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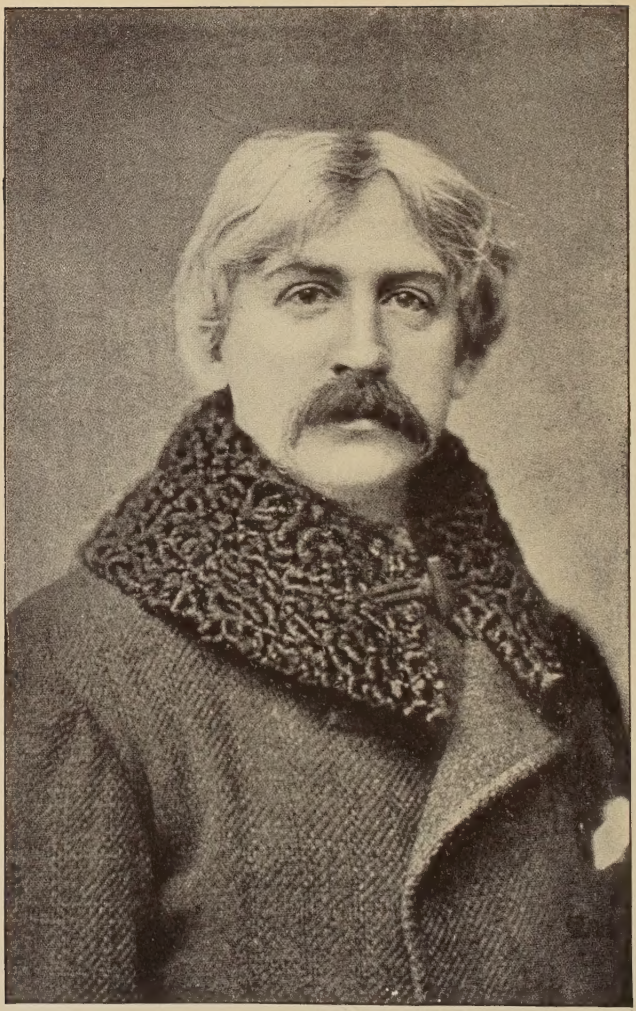

—At the time he was Consul at Crefeld, Germany, 1880

"ARGONAUT EDITION" OF
THE WORKS OF BRET HARTE

CLARENCE

THE STORY OF A MINE

BY

BRET HARTE

ILLUSTRATED

P. F. COLLIER & SON
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CLARENCE.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

As Clarence Brant, President of the Robles Land Company, and husband of the rich widow of John Peyton, of the Robles Ranche, mingled with the outgoing audience of the Cosmopolitan Theatre, at San Francisco, he elicited the usual smiling nods and recognition due to his good looks and good fortune. But as he hurriedly slipped through the still lingering winter's rain into the smart coupé that was awaiting him, and gave the order "Home," the word struck him with a peculiarly ironical significance. His home was a handsome one, and lacked nothing in appointment and comfort, but he had gone to the theatre to evade its hollow loneliness. Nor was it because his wife was not there, for he had a miserable consciousness that her temporary absence had nothing

to do with his homelessness. The distraction of the theatre over, that dull, vague, but aching sense of loneliness which was daily growing upon him returned with greater vigor.

He leaned back in the coupé and gloomily reflected.

He had been married scarcely a year, yet even in the illusions of the honeymoon the woman, older than himself, and the widow of his old patron, had half unconsciously reasserted herself, and slipped back into the domination of her old position. It was at first pleasant enough,— this half-maternal protectorate which is apt to mingle even with the affections of younger women,— and Clarence, in his easy, half-feminine intuition of the sex, yielded, as the strong are apt to yield, through the very consciousness of their own superiority. But this is a quality the weaker are not apt to recognize, and the woman who has once tasted equal power with her husband not only does not easily relegate it, but even makes its continuance a test of the affections. The usual triumphant feminine conclusion, "Then you no longer love me," had in Clarence's brief experience gone even further and reached

its inscrutable climax, "Then I no longer love you," although shown only in a momentary hardening of the eye and voice. And added to this was his sudden, but confused remembrance that he had seen that eye and heard that voice in marital altercation during Judge Peyton's life, and that he himself, her boy partisan, had sympathized with her. Yet, strange to say, this had given him more pain than her occasional other reversions to the past — to her old suspicions of him when he was a youthful protégé of her husband and a presumed suitor of her adopted daughter Susy. High natures are more apt to forgive wrong done to themselves than any abstract injustice. And her capricious tyranny over her dependents and servants, or an unreasoning enmity to a neighbor or friend, outraged his finer sense more than her own misconception of himself. Nor did he dream that this was a thing most women seldom understand, or, understanding, ever forgive.

The coupé rattled over the stones or swirled through the muddy pools of the main thoroughfares. Newspaper and telegraphic offices were still brilliantly lit, and crowds were gathered among the bulletin boards.

He knew that news had arrived from Washington that evening of the first active outbreaks of secession, and that the city was breathless with excitement. Had he not just come from the theatre, where certain insignificant allusions in the play had been suddenly caught up and cheered or hissed by hitherto unknown partisans, to the dumb astonishment of a majority of the audience comfortably settled to money-getting and their own affairs alone? Had he not applauded, albeit half-scornfully, the pretty actress — his old playmate Susy — who had audaciously and all incongruously waved the American flag in their faces? Yes! he had known it; had lived for the last few weeks in an atmosphere electrically surcharged with it — and yet it had chiefly affected him in his personal homelessness. For his wife was a Southerner, a born slaveholder, and a secessionist, whose noted prejudices to the North had even outrun her late husband's politics. At first the piquancy and recklessness of her opinionative speech amused him as part of her characteristic flavor, or as a lingering youthfulness which the maturer intellect always pardons. He had never taken her politics seriously — why

should he? With her head on his shoulder he had listened to her extravagant diatribes against the North. He had forgiven her outrageous indictment of his caste and his associates for the sake of the imperious but handsome lips that uttered it. But when he was compelled to listen to her words echoed and repeated by her friends and family; when he found that with the clannishness of her race she had drawn closer to them in this controversy, — that she depended upon them for her intelligence and information rather than upon him, — he had awakened to the reality of his situation. He had borne the allusions of her brother, whose old scorn for his dependent childhood had been embittered by his sister's marriage and was now scarcely concealed. Yet, while he had never altered his own political faith and social creed in this antagonistic atmosphere, he had often wondered, with his old conscientiousness and characteristic self-abnegation, whether his own political convictions were not merely a revulsion from his domestic tyranny and alien surroundings.

In the midst of this gloomy retrospect the coupé stopped with a jerk before his

own house. The door was quickly opened by a servant, who appeared to be awaiting him.

"Some one to see you in the library, sir," said the man, "and" — He hesitated and looked towards the coupé.

"Well?" said Clarence impatiently.

"He said, sir, as how you were not to send away the carriage."

"Indeed, and who is it?" demanded Clarence sharply.

"Mr. Hooker. He said I was to say Jim Hooker."

The momentary annoyance in Clarence's face changed to a look of reflective curiosity.

"He said he knew you were at the theatre, and he would wait until you came home," continued the man, dubiously watching his master's face. "He don't know you 've come in, sir, and — and I can easily get rid of him."

"No matter now. I 'll see him, and," added Clarence, with a faint smile, "let the carriage wait."

Yet, as he turned towards the library he was by no means certain that an interview with the old associate of his boyhood under Judge Peyton's guardianship would divert his mind. Yet he let no trace of his doubts

nor of his past gloom show in his face as he entered the room.

Mr. Hooker was apparently examining the elegant furniture and luxurious accommodation with his usual resentful enviousness. Clarence had got a "soft thing." That it was more or less the result of his "artfulness," and that he was unduly "puffed up" by it, was, in Hooker's characteristic reasoning, equally clear. As his host smilingly advanced with outstretched hand, Mr. Hooker's efforts to assume a proper abstraction of manner and contemptuous indifference to Clarence's surroundings which should wound his vanity ended in his lolling back at full length in the chair with his eyes on the ceiling. But, remembering suddenly that he was really the bearer of a message to Clarence, it struck him that his supine position was, from a theatrical view-point, infelicitous. In his experiences of the stage he had never delivered a message in that way. He rose awkwardly to his feet.

"It was so good of you to wait," said Clarence courteously.

"Saw you in the theatre," said Hooker brusquely. "Third row in parquet. Susy

said it was you, and had suthin' to say to you. Suthin' you ought to know," he continued, with a slight return of his old mystery of manner which Clarence so well remembered. "You saw *her* — she fetched the house with that flag business, eh? She knows which way the cat is going to jump, you bet. I tell you, for all the blowing of these secessionists, the Union 's goin' to pay! Yes, sir!" He stopped, glanced round the handsome room, and added darkly, "Mebbee better than this."

With the memory of Hooker's characteristic fondness for mystery still in his mind, Clarence overlooked the innuendo, and said smilingly, —

"Why did n't you bring Mrs. Hooker here? I should have been honored with her company."

Mr. Hooker frowned slightly at this seeming levity.

"Never goes out after a performance. Nervous exhaustion. Left her at our rooms in Market Street. We can drive there in ten minutes. That 's why I asked to have the carriage wait."

Clarence hesitated. Without caring in the least to renew the acquaintance of his

old playmate and sweetheart, a meeting that night in some vague way suggested to him a providential diversion. Nor was he deceived by any gravity in the message. With his remembrance of Susy's theatrical tendencies, he was quite prepared for any capricious futile extravagance.

"You are sure we will not disturb her?" he said politely.

"No."

Clarence led the way to the carriage. If Mr. Hooker expected him during the journey to try to divine the purport of Susy's message he was disappointed. His companion did not allude to it. Possibly looking upon it as a combined theatrical performance, Clarence preferred to wait for Susy as the better actor. The carriage rolled rapidly through the now deserted streets, and at last, under the directions of Mr. Hooker, who was leaning half out of the window, it drew up at a middle-class restaurant, above whose still lit and steaming windows were some ostentatiously public apartments, accessible from a side entrance. As they ascended the staircase together, it became evident that Mr. Hooker was scarcely more at his ease in the character of host than he

had been as guest. He stared gloomily at a descending visitor, grunted audibly at a waiter in the passage, and stopped before a door, where a recently deposited tray displayed the half-eaten carcase of a fowl, an empty champagne bottle, two half-filled glasses, and a faded bouquet. The whole passage was redolent with a singular blending of damp cooking, stale cigarette smoke, and patchouli.

Putting the tray aside with his foot, Mr. Hooker opened the door hesitatingly and peered into the room, muttered a few indistinct words, which were followed by a rapid rustling of skirts, and then, with his hand still on the door-knob, turning to Clarence, who had discreetly halted on the threshold, flung the door open theatrically and bade him enter.

"She is somewhere in the suite," he added, with a large wave of the hand towards a door that was still oscillating. "Be here in a minit."

Clarence took in the apartment with a quiet glance. Its furniture had the frayed and discolored splendors of a public parlor which had been privately used and maltreated; there were stains in the large

medallioned carpet; the gilded veneer had been chipped from a heavy centre table, showing the rough, white deal beneath, which gave it the appearance of a stage "property;" the walls, paneled with gilt-framed mirrors, reflected every domestic detail or private relaxation with shameless publicity. A damp waterproof, shawl, and open newspaper were lying across the once brilliant sofa; a powder-puff, a plate of fruit, and a play-book were on the centre table, and on the marble-topped sideboard was Mr. Hooker's second-best hat, with a soiled collar, evidently but lately exchanged for the one he had on, peeping over its brim. The whole apartment seemed to mingle the furtive disclosures of the dressing-room with the open ostentations of the stage, with even a slight suggestion of the auditorium in a few scattered programmes on the floor and chairs.

The inner door opened again with a slight theatrical start, and Susy, in an elaborate dressing-gown, moved languidly into the room. She apparently had not had time to change her underskirt, for there was the dust of the stage on its delicate lace edging, as she threw herself into an armchair and

crossed her pretty slippered feet before her. Her face was pale, its pallor incautiously increased by powder; and as Clarence looked at its still youthful, charming outline, he was not perhaps sorry that the exquisite pink and white skin beneath, which he had once kissed, was hidden from that awakened recollection. Yet there was little trace of the girlish Susy in the pretty, but prematurely jaded, actress before him, and he felt momentarily relieved. It was her youth and freshness appealing to his own youth and imagination that he had loved — not *her*. Yet as she greeted him with a slight exaggeration of glance, voice, and manner, he remembered that even as a girl she was an actress.

Nothing of this, however, was in his voice and manner as he gently thanked her for the opportunity of meeting her again. And he was frank, for the diversion he had expected he had found; he even was conscious of thinking more kindly of his wife who had supplanted her.

"I told Jim he must fetch you if he had to carry you," she said, striking the palm of her hand with her fan, and glancing at her husband. "I reckon he guessed *why*,

though I did n't tell him — I don't tell Jim *everything*."

Here Jim rose, and looking at his watch, "guessed he 'd run over to the Lick House and get some cigars." If he was acting upon some hint from his wife, his simulation was so badly done that Clarence felt his first sense of uneasiness. But as Hooker closed the door awkwardly and unostentatiously behind him, Clarence smilingly said he had waited to hear the message from her own lips.

"Jim only knows what he 's heard outside: the talk of men, you know, — and he hears a good deal of that — more, perhaps, than *you* do. It was that which put me up to finding out the truth. And I did n't rest till I did. I 'm not to be fooled, Clarence, — you don't mind my calling you Clarence now we 're both married and done for, — and I 'm not the kind to be fooled by anybody from the Cow counties — and that 's the Robles Ranche. I 'm a Southern woman myself from Missouri, but I 'm for the Union first, last, and all the time, and I call myself a match for any lazy, dawdling, lash-swinging slaveholder and slaveholderess — whether they 're mixed blood, Heaven only knows,

or what — or their friends or relations, or the dirty half-Spanish grandees and their mixed half-nigger peons who truckle to them. You bet!"

His blood had stirred quickly at the mention of the Robles Ranche, but the rest of Susy's speech was too much in the vein of her old extravagance to touch him seriously. He found himself only considering how strange it was that the old petulance and impulsiveness of her girlhood were actually bringing back with them her pink cheeks and brilliant eyes.

"You surely didn't ask Jim to bring me here," he said smilingly, "to tell me that Mrs. Peyton" — he corrected himself hastily as a malicious sparkle came into Susy's blue eyes — "that my wife was a Southern woman, and probably sympathized with her class? Well, I don't know that I should blame her for that any more than she should blame me for being a Northern man and a Unionist."

"And she does n't blame you?" asked Susy sneeringly.

The color came slightly to Clarence's cheek, but before he could reply the actress added,—

"No, she prefers to use you!"

"I don't think I understand you," said Clarence, rising coldly.

"No, you don't understand *her!*" retorted Susy sharply. "Look here, Clarence Brant, you 're right; I did n't ask you here to tell you — what you and everybody knows — that your wife is a Southerner. I did n't ask you here to tell you what everybody suspects — that she turns you round her little finger. But I did ask you here to tell you what nobody, not even you, suspects — but what *I* know! — and that is that she 's a *traitor* — and more, a *spy!* — and that I 've only got to say the word, or send that man Jim to say the word, to have her dragged out of her Copperhead den at Robles Ranche and shut up in Fort Alcatraz this very night!"

Still with the pink glowing in her rounding cheek, and eyes snapping like splintered sapphires, she rose to her feet, with her pretty shoulders lifted, her small hands and white teeth both tightly clenched, and took a step towards him. Even in her attitude there was a reminiscence of her willful childhood, although still blended with the provincial actress whom he had seen on the

stage only an hour ago. Thoroughly alarmed at her threat, in his efforts to conceal his feelings he was not above a weak retaliation. Stepping back, he affected to regard her with a critical admiration that was only half simulated, and said with a smile, —

"Very well done — but you have forgotten the flag."

She did not flinch. Rather accepting the sarcasm as a tribute to her art, she went on with increasing exaggeration: "No, it is *you* who have forgotten the flag — forgotten your country, your people, your manhood — everything for that high-toned, double-dyed old spy and traitress! For while you are standing here, your wife is gathering under her roof at Robles a gang of spies and traitors like herself — secession leaders and their bloated, drunken 'chivalry'! Yes, you may smile your superior smile, but I tell you, Clarence Brant, that with all your smartness and book learning you know no more of what goes on around you than a child. But others do! This conspiracy is known to the government, the Federal officers have been warned; General Sumner has been sent out here — and his first act was to

change the command at Fort Alcatraz, and send your wife's Southern friend — Captain Pinckney — to the right about! Yes — everything is known but *one* thing, and that is *where* and *how* this precious crew meet! That I alone know, and that I 've told you!"

"And I suppose," said Clarence, with an unchanged smile, "that this valuable information came from your husband — my old friend, Jim Hooker?"

"No," she answered sharply, "it comes from Cencho — one of your own peons — who is more true to you and the old Rancho than *you* have ever been. He saw what was going on, and came to me, to warn you!"

"But why not to me directly?" asked Clarence, with affected incredulity.

"Ask him!" she said viciously. "Perhaps he did n't want to warn the master against the mistress. Perhaps he thought *we* are still friends. Perhaps" — she hesitated with a lower voice and a forced smile — "perhaps he used to see us together in the old times."

"Very likely," said Clarence quietly. "And for the sake of those old times,

Susy," he went on, with a singular gentleness that was quite distinct from his paling face and set eyes, "I am going to forget all that you have just said of me and mine, in all the old willfulness and impatience that I see you still keep — with all your old prettiness." He took his hat from the table and gravely held out his hand.

She was frightened for a moment with his impassive abstraction. In the old days she had known it — had believed it was his dogged "obstinacy" — but she knew the hopelessness of opposing it. Yet with feminine persistency she again threw herself against it, as against a wall.

"You don't believe me! Well, go and see for yourself. They are at Robles *now*. If you catch the early morning stage at Santa Clara you will come upon them before they disperse. Dare you try it?"

"Whatever I do," he returned smilingly, "I shall always be grateful to you for giving me this opportunity of seeing you again *as you were*. Make my excuses to your husband. Good-night."

"Clarence!"

But he had already closed the door behind him. His face did not relax its expression

nor change as he looked again at the tray with its broken viands before the door, the worn, stained hall carpet, or the waiter who shuffled past him. He was apparently as critically conscious of them and of the close odors of the hall, and the atmosphere of listless decay and faded extravagance around him, as before the interview. But if the woman he had just parted from had watched him she would have supposed he still utterly disbelieved her story. Yet he was conscious that all that he saw was a part of his degradation, for he had believed every word she had uttered. Through all her extravagance, envy, and revengefulness he saw the central truth — that he had been deceived — not by his wife, but by himself! He had suspected all this before. This was what had been really troubling him — this was what he had put aside, rather than his faith, not in her, but in his ideal. He remembered letters that had passed between her and Captain Pinckney — letters that she had openly sent to notorious Southern leaders; her nervous anxiety to remain at the Rancho; the innuendoes and significant glances of friends which he had put aside — as he had this woman's message! Susy had

told him nothing new of his wife — but the truth of *himself!* And the revelation came from people who he was conscious were the inferiors of himself and his wife. To an independent, proud, and self-made man it was the culminating stroke.

In the same abstracted voice he told the coachman to drive home. The return seemed interminable — though he never shifted his position. Yet when he drew up at his own door and looked at his watch he found he had been absent only half an hour. Only half an hour! As he entered the house he turned with the same abstraction towards a mirror in the hall, as if he expected to see some outward and visible change in himself in that time. Dismissing his servants to bed, he went into his dressing-room, completely changed his attire, put on a pair of long riding-boots, and throwing a *serape* over his shoulders, paused a moment, took a pair of small "Derringer" pistols from a box, put them in his pockets, and then slipped cautiously down the staircase. A lack of confidence in his own domestics had invaded him for the first time. The lights were out. He silently opened the door and was in the street.

He walked hastily a few squares to a livery stable whose proprietor he knew. His first inquiry was for one "Redskin," a particular horse; the second for its proprietor. Happily both were in. The proprietor asked no question of a customer of Clarence's condition. The horse, half Spanish, powerful and irascible, was quickly saddled. As Clarence mounted, the man in an impulse of sociability said,—

"Saw you at the theatre to-night, sir."

"Ah," returned Clarence, quietly gathering up the reins.

"Rather a smart trick of that woman with the flag," he went on tentatively. Then, with a possible doubt of his customer's politics, he added with a forced smile, "I reckon it 's all party fuss, though; there ain't any real danger."

But fast as Clarence might ride the words lingered in his ears. He saw through the man's hesitation; he, too, had probably heard that Clarence Brant weakly sympathized with his wife's sentiments, and dared not speak fully. And he understood the cowardly suggestion that there was "no real danger." It had been Clarence's one fallacy. He had believed the public ex-

citement was only a temporary outbreak of partisan feeling, soon to subside. Even now he was conscious that he was less doubtful of the integrity of the Union than of his own household. It was not the devotion of the patriot, but the indignation of an outraged husband, that was spurring him on.

He knew that if he reached Woodville by five o'clock he could get ferried across the bay at the Embarcadero, and catch the down coach to Fair Plains, whence he could ride to the Rancho. As the coach did not connect directly with San Francisco, the chance of his surprising them was greater. Once clear of the city outskirts, he bullied Redskin into irascible speed, and plunged into the rainy darkness of the highroad. The way was familiar. For a while he was content to feel the buffeting, caused by his rapid pace, of wind and rain against his depressed head and shoulders in a sheer brutal sense of opposition and power, or to relieve his pent-up excitement by dashing through overflowed gullies in the road or across the quaggy, sodden edges of meadowland, until he had controlled Redskin's rebellious extravagance into a long steady stride. Then

he raised his head and straightened himself on the saddle, to think. But to no purpose. He had no plan; everything would depend upon the situation; the thought of forestalling any action of the conspirators, by warning or calling in the aid of the authorities, for an instant crossed his mind, but was as instantly dismissed. He had but an instinct — to see with his own eyes what his reason told him was true. Day was breaking through drifting scud and pewter-colored clouds as he reached Woodville ferry, checkered with splashes of the soil and the spume of his horse, from whose neck and flanks the sweat rolled like lather. Yet he was not conscious how intent had been his purpose until he felt a sudden instinctive shock on seeing that the ferryboat was gone. For an instant his wonderful self-possession abandoned him; he could only gaze vacantly at the leaden-colored bay, without a thought or expedient. But in another moment he saw that the boat was returning from the distance. Had he lost his only chance? He glanced hurriedly at his watch; he had come more quickly than he imagined; there would still be time. He beckoned impatiently to the ferryman; the

boat — a ship's pinnace, with two men in it — crept in with exasperating slowness. At last the two rowers suddenly leaped ashore.

"Ye might have come before, with the other passenger. We don't reckon to run lightnin' trips on this ferry."

But Clarence was himself again. "Twenty dollars for two more oars in that boat," he said quietly, "and fifty if you get me over in time to catch the down stage."

The man glanced at Clarence's eyes. "Run up and rouse out Jake and Sam," he said to the other boatman; then more leisurely, gazing at his customer's travel-stained equipment, he said, "There must have been a heap o' passengers got left by last night's boat. You 're the second man that took this route in a hurry."

At any other time the coincidence might have struck Clarence. But he only answered curtly, "Unless we are under way in ten minutes you will find I am *not* the second man, and that our bargain 's off."

But here two men emerged from the shanty beside the ferryhouse, and tumbled sleepily into the boat. Clarence seized an extra pair of sculls that were standing

against the shed, and threw them into the stern. "I don't mind taking a hand myself for exercise," he said quietly.

The ferryman glanced again at Clarence's travel-worn figure and determined eyes with mingled approval and surprise. He lingered a moment with his oars lifted, looking at his passenger. "It ain't no business o' mine, young man," he said deliberately, "but I reckon you understand me when I say that I 've just taken another man over there."

"I do," said Clarence impatiently.

"And you still want to go?"

"Certainly," replied Clarence, with a cold stare, taking up his oars.

The man shrugged his shoulders, bent himself for the stroke, and the boat sprung forward. The others rowed strongly and rapidly, the tough ashen blades springing like steel from the water, the heavy boat seeming to leap in successive bounds until they were fairly beyond the curving inshore current and clearing the placid, misty surface of the bay. Clarence did not speak, but bent abstractedly over his oar; the ferryman and his crew rowed in equal panting silence; a few startled ducks whirred before

them, but dropped again to rest. In half an hour they were at the Embarcadero. The time was fairly up. Clarence's eyes were eagerly bent for the first appearance of the stage-coach around the little promontory; the ferryman was as eagerly scanning the bare, empty street of the still sleeping settlement.

"I don't see him anywhere," said the ferryman with a glance, half of astonishment and half of curiosity, at his solitary passenger.

"See whom?" asked Clarence carelessly, as he handed the man his promised fee.

"The other man I ferried over to catch the stage. He must have gone on without waiting. You 're in luck, young fellow!"

"I don't understand you," said Clarence impatiently. "What has your previous passenger to do with me?"

"Well, I reckon you know best. He 's the kind of man, gin'rally speaking, that other men, in a pow'ful hurry, don't care to meet — and, az a rule, don't *foller* arter. It 's gin'rally the other way."

"What do you mean?" inquired Clarence sternly. "Of whom are you speaking?"

"The Chief of Police of San Francisco!"

CHAPTER II.

The laugh that instinctively broke from Clarence's lips was so sincere and unaffected that the man was disconcerted, and at last joined in it, a little shamefacedly. The grotesque blunder of being taken as a fugitive from justice relieved Clarence's mind from its acute tension,— he was momentarily diverted,— and it was not until the boatman had departed, and he was again alone, that it seemed to have any collateral significance. Then an uneasy recollection of Susy's threat that she had the power to put his wife in Fort Alcatraz came across him. Could she have already warned the municipal authorities and this man? But he quickly remembered that any action from such a warning could only have been taken by the United States Marshal, and not by a civic official, and dismissed the idea.

Nevertheless, when the stage with its half-spent lamps still burning dimly against the morning light swept round the curve and

rolled heavily up to the rude shanty which served as coach-office, he became watchful. A single yawning individual in its doorway received a few letters and parcels, but Clarence was evidently the *only* waiting passenger. Any hope that he might have entertained that his mysterious predecessor would emerge from some seclusion at that moment was disappointed. As he entered the coach he made a rapid survey of his fellow-travelers, but satisfied himself that the stranger was not among them. They were mainly small traders or farmers, a miner or two, and apparently a Spanish-American of better degree and personality. Possibly the circumstance that men of this class usually preferred to travel on horseback and were rarely seen in public conveyances attracted his attention, and their eyes met more than once in mutual curiosity. Presently Clarence addressed a remark to the stranger in Spanish; he replied fluently and courteously, but at the next stopping-place he asked a question of the expressman in an unmistakable Missouri accent. Clarence's curiosity was satisfied; he was evidently one of those early American settlers who had been so long domiciled in Southern

California as to adopt the speech as well as the habiliments of the Spaniard.

The conversation fell upon the political news of the previous night, or rather seemed to be lazily continued from some previous, more excited discussion, in which one of the contestants — a red-bearded miner — had subsided into an occasional growl of surly dissent. It struck Clarence that the Missourian had been an amused auditor and even, judging from a twinkle in his eye, a mischievous instigator of the controversy. He was not surprised, therefore, when the man turned to him with a certain courtesy and said,—

"And what, sir, is the political feeling in *your* district?"

But Clarence was in no mood to be drawn out, and replied, almost curtly, that as he had come only from San Francisco, they were probably as well informed on that subject as himself. A quick and searching glance from the stranger's eye made him regret his answer, but in the silence that ensued the red-bearded miner, evidently still rankling at heart, saw his opportunity. Slapping his huge hands on his knees, and leaning far forward until he seemed to plunge his flam-

ing beard, like a firebrand, into the controversy, he said grimly,—

"Well, I kin tell you, gen'l'men, *this*. It ain't goin' to be no matter wot 's the *political feeling* here or thar — it ain't goin' to be no matter wot 's the State's rights and wot 's Fed'ral rights — it ain't goin' to be no question whether the gov'ment 's got the right to relieve its own soldiers that those Secesh is besieging in Fort Sumter or whether they have n't — but the first gun that 's fired at the flag blows the chains off every d——n nigger south of Mason and Dixon's line! You hear me! I 'm shoutin'! And whether you call yourselves 'Secesh' or 'Union' or 'Copperhead' or 'Peace men,' you 've got to face it!"

There was an angry start in one or two of the seats; one man caught at the swinging side-strap and half rose, a husky voice began, "It 's a d——d" — and then all as suddenly subsided. Every eye was turned to an insignificant figure in the back seat. It was a woman, holding a child on her lap, and gazing out of the window with her sex's profound unconcern in politics. Clarence understood the rude chivalry of the road well enough to comprehend that this

unconscious but omnipotent figure had more than once that day controlled the passions of the disputants. They dropped back weakly to their seats, and their mutterings rolled off in the rattle of the wheels. Clarence glanced at the Missourian; he was regarding the red-bearded miner with a singular curiosity.

The rain had ceased, but the afternoon shadows were deepening when they at last reached Fair Plains, where Clarence expected to take horse to the Rancho. He was astonished, however, to learn that all the horses in the stable were engaged, but remembering that some of his own stock were in pasturage with a tenant at Fair Plains, and that he should probably have a better selection, he turned his steps thither. Passing out of the stable-yard he recognized the Missourian's voice in whispered conversation with the proprietor, but the two men withdrew into the shadow as he approached. An ill-defined uneasiness came over him; he knew the proprietor, who also seemed to know the Missourian, and this evident avoidance of him was significant. Perhaps his reputation as a doubtful Unionist had preceded him, but this would not account for

their conduct in a district so strongly Southern in sympathy as Fair Plains. More impressed by the occurrence than he cared to admit, when at last, after some delay, he had secured his horse, and was once more in the saddle, he kept a sharp lookout for his quondam companion. But here another circumstance added to his suspicions : there was a main road leading to Santa Inez, the next town, and the Rancho, and this Clarence had purposely taken in order to watch the Missourian; but there was also a cut-off directly to the Rancho, known only to the habitués of the Rancho. After a few moments' rapid riding on a mustang much superior to any in the hotel stables, he was satisfied that the stranger must have taken the cut-off. Putting spurs to his horse he trusted still to precede him to the Rancho — if that were his destination.

As he dashed along the familiar road, by a strange perversity of fancy, instead of thinking of his purpose, he found himself recalling the first time he had ridden that way in the flush of his youth and hopefulness. The girl-sweetheart he was then going to rejoin was now the wife of another; the woman who had been her guardian was

now his own wife. He had accepted without a pang the young girl's dereliction, but it was through her revelation that he was now about to confront the dereliction of his own wife. And this was the reward of his youthful trust and loyalty! A bitter laugh broke from his lips. It was part of his still youthful self-delusion that he believed himself wiser and stronger for it.

It was quite dark when he reached the upper field or first terrace of the Rancho. He could see the white walls of the casa rising dimly out of the green sea of early wild grasses, like a phantom island. It was here that the cut-off joined the main road — now the only one that led to the casa. He was satisfied that no one could have preceded him from Fair Plains; but it was true that he must take precautions against his own discovery. Dismounting near a clump of willows, he unsaddled and unbridled his horse, and with a cut of the riata over its haunches sent it flying across the field in the direction of a band of feeding mustangs, which it presently joined. Then, keeping well in the shadow of a belt of shrub-oaks, he skirted the long lesser terraces of the casa, intending to approach the

house by way of the old garden and corral. A drizzling rain, occasionally driven by the wind into long, misty, curtain-like waves, obscured the prospect and favored his design. He reached the low adobe wall of the corral in safety; looking over he could detect, in spite of the darkness, that a number of the horses were of alien brands, and even recognized one or two from the Santa Inez district. The vague outline of buggies and carryalls filled the long shed beside the stables. There *was* company at the casa — so far Susy was right!

Nevertheless, lingering still by the wall of the old garden for the deepening of night, his nervous feverishness was again invaded and benumbed by sullen memories. There was the opening left by the old grille in the wall, behind which Mrs. Peyton stood on the morning when he thought he was leaving the ranch forever; where he had first clasped her in his arms, and stayed. A turn of the head, a moment's indecision, a single glance of a languorous eye, had brought this culmination. And now he stood again before that ruined grille, his house and lands, even his *name*, misused by a mad, scheming enthusiast, and himself a

creeping spy of his own dishonor! He turned with a bitter smile again to the garden. A few dark red Castilian roses still leaned forward and swayed in the wind with dripping leaves. It was here that the first morning of his arrival he had kissed Susy; the perfume and color of her pink skin came back to him with a sudden shock as he stood there; he caught at a flower, drew it towards him, inhaled its odor in a long breath that left him faint and leaning against the wall. Then again he smiled, but this time more wickedly — in what he believed his cynicism had sprung up the first instinct of revenge!

It was now dark enough for him to venture across the carriage road and make his way to the rear of the house. His first characteristic instinct had been to enter openly at his own front gate, but the terrible temptation to overhear and watch the conspiracy unobserved — that fascination common to deceived humanity to witness its own shame — had now grown upon him. He knew that a word or gesture of explanation, apology, appeal, or even terror from his wife would check his rage and weaken his purpose. His perfect knowledge of the

house and the security of its inmates would enable him from some obscure landing or gallery to participate in any secret conclave they might hold in the patio — the only place suitable for so numerous a rendezvous. The absence of light in the few external windows pointed to this central gathering. And he had already conceived his plan of entrance.

Gaining the rear wall of the casa he began cautiously to skirt its brambly base until he had reached a long, oven-like window half obliterated by a monstrous passion vine. It was the window of what had once been Mrs. Peyton's boudoir; the window by which he had once forced an entrance to the house when it was in the hands of squatters, the window from which Susy had signaled her Spanish lover, the window whose grating had broken the neck of Judge Peyton's presumed assassin. But these recollections no longer delayed him; the moment for action had arrived. He knew that since the tragedy the boudoir had been dismantled and shunned; the servants believed it to be haunted by the assassin's ghost. With the aid of the passion vine the ingress was easy; the interior window was open; the

rustle of dead leaves on the bare floor as he entered, and the whir of a frightened bird by his ear, told the story of its desolation and the source of the strange noises that had been heard there. The door leading to the corridor was lightly bolted, merely to keep it from rattling in the wind. Slipping the bolt with the blade of his pocket-knife he peered into the dark passage. The light streaming under a door to the left, and the sound of voices, convinced him that his conjecture was right, and the meeting was gathered on the broad balconies around the patio. He knew that a narrow gallery, faced with Venetian blinds to exclude the sun, looked down upon them. He managed to gain it without discovery; luckily the blinds were still down; between their slats, himself invisible, he could hear and see everything that occurred.

Yet even at this supreme moment the first thing that struck him was the almost ludicrous contrast between the appearance of the meeting and its tremendous object. Whether he was influenced by any previous boyish conception of a clouded and gloomy conspiracy he did not know, but he was for an instant almost disconcerted by the apparent

levity and festivity of the conclave. Decanters and glasses stood on small tables before them; nearly all were drinking and smoking. They comprised fifteen or twenty men, some of whose faces were familiar to him elsewhere as Southern politicians; a few, he was shocked to see, were well-known Northern Democrats. Occupying a characteristically central position was the famous Colonel Starbottle, of Virginia. Jaunty and youthful-looking in his mask-like, beardless face, expansive and dignified in his middle-aged port and carriage, he alone retained some of the importance — albeit slightly theatrical and affected — of the occasion. Clarence in his first hurried glance had not observed his wife, and for a moment had felt relieved; but as Colonel Starbottle arose at that moment, and with a studiously chivalrous and courtly manner turned to his right, he saw that she was sitting at the further end of the balcony, and that a man whom he recognized as Captain Pinckney was standing beside her. The blood quickly tightened around his heart, but left him cold and observant.

"It was seldom, indeed," remarked Colonel Starbottle, placing his fat fingers in

the frill of his shirt front, "that a movement like this was graced with the actual presence of a lofty, inspiring, yet delicate spirit — a Boadicea — indeed, he might say a Joan of Arc — in the person of their charming hostess, Mrs. Brant. Not only were they favored by her social and hospitable ministration, but by her active and enthusiastic coöperation in the glorious work they had in hand. It was through her correspondence and earnest advocacy that they were to be favored to-night with the aid and counsel of one of the most distinguished and powerful men in the Southern district of California, Judge Beeswinger, of Los Angeles. He had not the honor of that gentleman's personal acquaintance; he believed he was not far wrong in saying that this was also the misfortune of every gentleman present; but the name itself was a tower of strength. He would go further, and say that Mrs. Brant herself was personally unacquainted with him, but it was through the fervor, poetry, grace, and genius of her correspondence with that gentleman that they were to have the honor of his presence that very evening. It was understood that advices had been received of his

departure, and that he might be expected at Robles at any moment."

"But what proof have we of Judge Beeswinger's soundness?" said a lazy Southern voice at the conclusion of Colonel Starbottle's periods. "Nobody here seems to know him by sight: is it not risky to admit a man to our meeting whom we are unable to identify?"

"I reckon nobody but a fool or some prying mudsill of a Yankee would trust his skin here," returned another; "and if he did we 'd know what to do with him."

But Clarence's attention was riveted on his wife, and the significant speech passed him as unheeded as had the colonel's rhetoric. She was looking very handsome and slightly flushed, with a proud light in her eyes that he had never seen before. Absorbed in the discussion, she seemed to be paying little attention to Captain Pinckney as she rose suddenly to her feet.

"Judge Beeswinger will be attended here by Mr. MacNiel, of the Fair Plains Hotel, who will vouch for him and introduce him," she said in a clear voice, which rang with an imperiousness that Clarence well remembered. "The judge was to arrive by the

coach from Martinez to Fair Plains, and is due now."

"Is there no *gentleman* to introduce him? Must we take him on the word of a common trader — by Jove! a whiskey-seller?" continued the previous voice sneeringly.

"On the word of a lady, Mr. Brooks," said Captain Pinckney, with a slight gesture towards Mrs. Brant — "who answers for both."

Clarence had started slightly at his wife's voice and the information it conveyed. His fellow-passenger, and the confidant of MacNiel, was the man they were expecting! If they had recognized him, Clarence, would they not warn the company of his proximity? He held his breath as the sound of voices came from the outer gate of the courtyard. Mrs. Brant rose; at the same moment the gate swung open, and a man entered. It *was* the Missourian.

He turned with old-fashioned courtesy to the single woman standing on the balcony.

"My fair correspondent, I believe! I am Judge Beeswinger. Your agent, MacNiel, passed me through your guards at the gate, but I did not deem it advisable to bring him into this assembly of gentlemen with-

out your further consideration. I trust I was right."

The quiet dignity and self-possession, the quaint, old-fashioned colonial precision of speech, modified by a soft Virginian intonation, and, above all, some singular individuality of the man himself, produced a profound sensation, and seemed to suddenly give the gathering an impressiveness it had lacked before. For an instant Clarence forgot himself and his personal wrongs in the shock of indignation he felt at this potent addition to the ranks of his enemies. He saw his wife's eyes sparkle with pride over her acquisition, and noticed that Pinckney cast a disturbed glance at the newcomer.

The stranger ascended the few steps to the balcony and took Mrs. Brant's hand with profound courtesy. "Introduce me to my colleagues — distinctly and separately. It behooves a man at such a moment to know to whom he entrusts his life and honor, and the life and honor of his cause."

It was evidently no mere formal courtesy to the stranger. As he stepped forward along the balcony, and under Mrs. Brant's graceful guidance was introduced to each of the members, he not only listened with

scrupulous care and attention to the name and profession of each man, but bent upon him a clear, searching glance that seemed to photograph him in his memory. With two exceptions. He passed Colonel Starbottle's expanding shirt frill with a bow of elaborate precision, and said, "Colonel Starbottle's fame requires neither introduction nor explanation." He stopped before Captain Pinckney and paused.

"An officer of the United States army, I believe, sir?"

"Yes."

"Educated at West Point, I think, by the government, to whom you have taken the oath of allegiance?"

"Yes."

"Very good, sir," said the stranger, turning away.

"You have forgotten one other fact, sir," said Pinckney, with a slightly supercilious air.

"Indeed! What is it?"

"I am, first of all, a native of the State of South Carolina!"

A murmur of applause and approval ran round the balcony. Captain Pinckney smiled and exchanged glances with Mrs.

Brant, but the stranger quietly returned to the central table beside Colonel Starbottle. "I am not only an unexpected delegate to this august assembly, gentlemen," he began gravely, "but I am the bearer of perhaps equally unexpected news. By my position in the Southern district I am in possession of dispatches received only this morning by pony express. Fort Sumter has been besieged. The United States flag, carrying relief to the beleaguered garrison, has been fired upon by the State of South Carolina."

A burst of almost hysteric applause and enthusiasm broke from the assembly, and made the dim, vault-like passages and corridors of the casa ring. Cheer after cheer went up to the veiled gallery and the misty sky beyond. Men mounted on the tables and waved their hands frantically, and in the midst of this bewildering turbulence of sound and motion Clarence saw his wife mounted on a chair, with burning cheeks and flashing eyes, waving her handkerchief like an inspired priestess. Only the stranger, still standing beside Colonel Starbottle, remained unmoved and impassive. Then, with an imperative gesture, he demanded a sudden silence.

"Convincing and unanimous as this demonstration is, gentlemen," he began quietly, "it is my duty, nevertheless, to ask you if you have seriously considered the meaning of the news I have brought. It is my duty to tell you that it means civil war. It means the clash of arms between two sections of a mighty country; it means the disruption of friends, the breaking of family ties, the separation of fathers and sons, of brothers and sisters — even, perhaps, to the disseverment of husband and wife!"

"It means the sovereignty of the South — and the breaking of a covenant with low-born traders and abolitionists," said Captain Pinckney.

"If there are any gentlemen present," continued the stranger, without heeding the interruption, "who have pledged this State to the support of the South in this emergency, or to the establishment of a Pacific republic in aid and sympathy with it, whose names are on this paper" — he lifted a sheet of paper lying before Colonel Starbottle — "but who now feel that the gravity of the news demands a more serious consideration of the purpose, they are at liberty to withdraw from the meeting, giving their

honor, as Southern gentlemen, to keep the secret intact."

"Not if I know it," interrupted a stalwart Kentuckian, as he rose to his feet and strode down the steps to the patio. "For," he added, placing his back against the gateway, "I 'll shoot the first coward that backs out now."

A roar of laughter and approval followed, but was silenced again by the quiet, unimpassioned voice of the stranger. "If, on the other hand," he went on calmly, "you all feel that this news is the fitting culmination and consecration of the hopes, wishes, and plans of this meeting, you will assert it again, over your own signatures, to Colonel Starbottle at this table."

When the Kentuckian had risen, Clarence had started from his concealment, when he now saw the eager figures pressing forward to the table he hesitated no longer. Slipping along the passage, he reached the staircase which led to the corridor in the rear of the balcony. Descending this rapidly, he not only came upon the backs of the excited crowd around the table, but even elbowed one of the conspirators aside without being noticed. His wife, who had risen

from her chair at the end of the balcony, was already moving towards the table. With a quick movement he seized her wrist, and threw her back in the chair again. A cry broke from her lips as she recognized him, but still holding her wrist, he stepped quickly between her and the astonished crowd. There was a moment of silence, then the cry of "Spy!" and "Seize him!" rose quickly, but above all the voice and figure of the Missourian was heard commanding them to stand back. Turning to Clarence, he said quietly,—

"I should know your face, sir. Who are you?"

"The husband of this woman and the master of this house," said Clarence as quietly, but in a voice he hardly recognized as his own.

"Stand aside from her, then — unless you are hoping that her danger may protect *you!*" said the Kentuckian, significantly drawing his revolver.

But Mrs. Brant sprang suddenly to her feet beside Clarence.

"We are neither of us cowards, Mr. Brooks — though he speaks the truth — and — more shame to me" — she added, with a

look of savage scorn at Clarence — "*is my husband!*"

"What is your purpose in coming here?" continued Judge Beeswinger, with his eyes fixed on Clarence.

"I have given you all the information," said Clarence quietly, "that is necessary to make you, as a gentleman, leave this house at once — and that is my purpose. It is all the information you will get from me as long as you and your friends insult my roof with your uninvited presence. What I may have to say to you and each of you hereafter — what I may choose to demand of you, according to your own code of honor," — he fixed his eyes on Captain Pinckney's, — "is another question, and one not usually discussed before a lady."

"Pardon me. A moment — a single moment."

It was the voice of Colonel Starbottle; it was the frilled shirt front, the lightly buttoned blue coat with its expanding lapels, like bursting petals, and the smiling mask of that gentleman rising above the table and bowing to Clarence Brant and his wife with infinite courtesy. "The — er — humiliating situation in which we find ourselves, gentle-

men,— the reluctant witnesses of — er — what we trust is only a temporary disagreement between our charming hostess and the — er — gentleman whom she recognized under the highest title to our consideration, — is distressing to us all, and would seem to amply justify that gentleman's claims to a personal satisfaction, which I know we would all delight to give. But that situation rests upon the supposition that our gathering here was of a purely social or festive nature! It may be," continued the colonel with a blandly reflective air, "that the spectacle of these decanters and glasses, and the nectar furnished us by our Hebe-like hostess" (he lifted a glass of whiskey and water to his lips while he bowed to Mrs. Brant gracefully), "has led the gentleman to such a deduction. But when I suggest to him that our meeting was of a business, or private nature, it strikes me that the question of intrusion may be fairly divided between him and ourselves. We may be even justified, in view of that privacy, in asking him if his — er — entrance to this house was — er — coincident with his appearance among us."

"With my front door in possession of

strangers," said Clarence, more in reply to a sudden contemptuous glance from his wife than Starbottle's insinuation, "I entered the house through the window."

"Of my boudoir, where another intruder once broke his neck," interrupted his wife with a mocking laugh.

"Where I once helped this lady to regain possession of her house when it was held by another party of illegal trespassers, who, however, were content to call themselves 'jumpers,' and did not claim the privacy of gentlemen."

"Do you mean to imply, sir," began Colonel Starbottle haughtily, "that"—

"I mean to imply, sir," said Clarence with quiet scorn, "that I have neither the wish to know nor the slightest concern in any purpose that brought you here, and that when you quit the house you take your secrets and your privacy with you intact, without let or hindrance from me."

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Brant," said Judge Beeswinger, suppressing the angry interruption of his fellows with a dominant wave of his hand, as he fixed his eyes on Clarence keenly, "that you have no sympathy with your wife's political sentiments?"

"I have already given you the information necessary to make you quit this house, and that is all you have a right to know," returned Clarence with folded arms.

"But *I* can answer for him," said Mrs. Brant, rising, with a quivering voice and curling lip. "There *is* no sympathy between us. We are as far apart as the poles. We have nothing in common but this house and his name."

"But you are husband and wife, bound together by a sacred compact."

"A compact!" echoed Mrs. Brant, with a bitter laugh. "Yes, the compact that binds South Carolina to the nigger-worshiping Massachusetts. The compact that links together white and black, the gentleman and the trader, the planter and the poor white — the compact of those *United* States. Bah! *that* has been broken, and so can this."

Clarence's face paled. But before he could speak there was a rapid clattering at the gate and a dismounted vaquero entered excitedly. Turning to Mrs. Brant he said hurriedly, "Mother of God! the casa is surrounded by a rabble of mounted men, and there is one among them even now who

demands admittance in the name of the Law."

"This is your work," said Brooks, facing Clarence furiously. "You have brought them with you, but, by God, they shall not save you!" He would have clutched Clarence, but the powerful arm of Judge Beeswinger intervened. Nevertheless, he still struggled to reach Clarence, appealing to the others: "Are you fools to stand there and let him triumph! Don't you see the cowardly Yankee trick he's played upon us?"

"He has not," said Mrs. Brant haughtily. "I have no reason to love him or his friends; but I know he does not lie."

"Gentlemen! — gentlemen!" implored Colonel Starbottle with beaming and unctuous persuasion, "may I — er — remark — that all this is far from the question? Are we to be alarmed because an unknown rabble, no matter whence they come, demand entrance here in the name of the Law? I am not aware of any law of the State of California that we are infringing. By all means admit them."

The gate was thrown open. A single thick-set man, apparently unarmed and

dressed like an ordinary traveler, followed by half a dozen other equally unpretentious-looking men, entered. The leader turned to the balcony.

"I am the Chief of Police of San Francisco. I have warrants for the arrest of Colonel Culpepper Starbottle, Joshua Brooks, Captain Pinckney, Clarence Brant and Alice his wife, and others charged with inciting to riot and unlawful practice calculated to disturb the peace of the State of California and its relations with the Federal government," said the leader, in a dry official voice.

Clarence started. In spite of its monotonous utterance it was the voice of the red-bearded controversialist of the stage-coach. But where were his characteristic beard and hair? Involuntarily Clarence glanced at Judge Beeswinger; that gentleman was quietly regarding the stranger with an impassive face that betrayed no recognition whatever.

"But the city of San Francisco has no jurisdiction here," said Colonel Starbottle, turning a bland smile towards his fellow-members. "I am — er — sorry to inform you that you are simply trespassing, sir."

"I am here also as deputy sheriff," returned the stranger coolly. "We were unable to locate the precise place of this meeting, although we knew of its existence. I was sworn in this morning at Santa Inez by the judge of this district, and these gentlemen with me are my posse."

There was a quick movement of resistance by the members, which was, however, again waived blandly aside by Colonel Starbottle. Leaning forward in a slightly forensic attitude, with his fingers on the table and a shirt frill that seemed to have become of itself erectile, he said, with pained but polite precision, "I grieve to have to state, sir, that even that position is utterly untenable here. I am a lawyer myself, as my friend here, Judge Beeswinger — eh? I beg your pardon!"

The officer of the law had momentarily started, with his eyes fixed on Judge Beeswinger, who, however, seemed to be quietly writing at the table.

"As Judge Beeswinger," continued Colonel Starbottle, "will probably tell you; and as a jurist himself, he will also probably agree with me when I also inform you that, as the United States government is

an aggrieved party, it is a matter for the Federal courts to prosecute, and that the only officer we can recognize is the United States Marshal for the district. When I add that the marshal, Colonel Crackenthorpe, is one of my oldest friends, and an active sympathizer with the South in the present struggle, you will understand that any action from him in this matter is exceedingly improbable."

The general murmur of laughter, relief, and approval was broken by the quiet voice of Judge Beeswinger.

"Let me see your warrant, Mr. Deputy Sheriff."

The officer approached him with a slightly perplexed and constrained air, and exhibited the paper. Judge Beeswinger handed it back to him. "Colonel Starbottle is quite right in his contention," he said quietly; "the only officer that this assembly can recognize is the United States Marshal or his legal deputy. But Colonel Starbottle is wrong in his supposition that Colonel Crackenthorpe still retains the functions of that office. He was removed by the President of the United States, and his successor was appointed and sworn in by the Federal judge

early this morning." He paused, and folding up the paper on which he had been writing, placed it in the hands of the deputy. "And this," he continued in the same even voice, "constitutes you his deputy, and will enable you to carry out your duty in coming here."

"What the devil does this mean, sir? Who are you?" gasped Colonel Starbottle, recoiling suddenly from the man at his side.

"I am the new United States Marshal for the Southern District of California."

CHAPTER III.

Unsuspected and astounding as the revelation was to Clarence, its strange reception by the conspirators seemed to him as astounding. He had started forward, half expecting that the complacent and self-confessed spy would be immolated by his infuriated dupes. But to his surprise the shock seemed to have changed their natures, and given them the dignity they had lacked. The excitability, irritation, and recklessness which had previously characterized them had disappeared. The deputy and his posse, who had advanced to the assistance of their revealed chief, met with no resistance. They had evidently, as if with one accord, drawn away from Judge Beeswinger, leaving a cleared space around him, and regarded their captors with sullen contemptuous silence. It was only broken by Colonel Starbottle: —

"Your duty commands you, sir, to use all possible diligence in bringing us before

the Federal judge of this district — unless your master in Washington has violated the Constitution so far as to remove him, too!"

"I understand you perfectly," returned Judge Beeswinger, with unchanged composure; "and as you know that Judge Wilson unfortunately cannot be removed except through a regular course of impeachment, I suppose you may still count upon his Southern sympathies to befriend you. With that I have nothing to do; my duty is complete when my deputy has brought you before him and I have stated the circumstances of the arrest."

"I congratulate you, sir," said Captain Pinckney, with an ironical salute, "on your prompt reward for your treachery to the South, and your equally prompt adoption of the peculiar tactics of your friends in the way in which you have entered this house."

"I am sorry I cannot congratulate *you*, sir," returned Judge Beeswinger gravely, "on breaking your oath to the government which has educated and supported you and given you the epaulettes you disgrace. Nor shall I discuss 'treachery' with the man who has not only violated the trust of his country, but even the integrity of his

friend's household. It is for that reason that I withhold the action of this warrant in so far as it affects the persons of the master and mistress of this home. I am satisfied that Mr. Brant has been as ignorant of what has been done here as I am that his wife has been only the foolish dupe of a double traitor!"

"Silence!"

The words broke simultaneously from the lips of Clarence and Captain Pinckney. They stood staring at each other — the one pale, the other crimson — as Mrs. Brant, apparently oblivious of the significance of their united adjuration, turned to Judge Beeswinger in the fury of her still stifled rage and mortification.

"Keep your mercy for your fellow-spy," she said, with a contemptuous gesture towards her husband; "*I* go with these gentlemen!"

"You will not," said Clarence quietly, "until I have said a word to you alone." He laid his hand firmly upon her wrist.

The deputy and his prisoners filed slowly out of the courtyard together, the latter courteously saluting Mrs. Brant as they passed, but turning from Judge Beeswinger

in contemptuous silence. The judge followed them to the gate, but there he paused. Turning to Mrs. Brant, who was still half struggling in the strong grip of her husband, he said, —

"Any compunction I may have had in misleading you by accepting your invitation here I dismissed after I had entered this house. And I trust," he added, turning to Clarence sternly, "I leave you the master of it!"

As the gate closed behind him, Clarence locked it. When his wife turned upon him angrily, he said quietly, —

"I have no intention of restraining your liberty a moment after our interview is over, but until then I do not intend to be disturbed."

She threw herself disdainfully back in her chair, her hands clasped in her lap in half-contemptuous resignation, with her eyes upon her long slim arched feet crossed before her. Even in her attitude there was something of her old fascination which, however, now seemed to sting Clarence to the quick.

"I have nothing to say to you in regard to what has just passed in this house, except

that as long as I remain even nominally its master it shall not be repeated. Although I shall no longer attempt to influence or control your political sympathies, I shall not allow you to indulge them where in any way they seem to imply my sanction. But so little do I oppose your liberty, that you are free to rejoin your political companions whenever you choose to do so on your own responsibility. But I must first know from your own lips whether your sympathies are purely political — or a name for something else?"

She had alternately flushed and paled, although still keeping her scornful attitude as he went on, but there was no mistaking the genuineness of her vague wonderment at his concluding words.

"I don't understand you," she said, lifting her eyes to his in a moment of cold curiosity. "What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? What did Judge Beeswinger mean when he called Captain Pinckney a double traitor?" he said roughly.

She sprang to her feet with flashing eyes. "And you — *you!* dare to repeat the cowardly lie of a confessed spy. This, then, is what you wished to tell me — this the insult

for which you have kept me here; because you are incapable of understanding unselfish patriotism or devotion — even to your own cause — you dare to judge me by your own base, Yankee-trading standards. Yes, it is worthy of you!" She walked rapidly up and down, and then suddenly faced him. "I understand it all; I appreciate your magnanimity now. You are willing I should join the company of these chivalrous gentlemen in order to give color to your calumnies! Say at once that it was you who put up this spy to correspond with me — to come here — in order to entrap me. Yes! entrap me — I — who a moment ago stood up for you before these gentlemen, and said you could not lie. Bah!"

Struck only by the wild extravagance of her speech and temper, Clarence did not know that when women are most illogical they are apt to be most sincere, and from a man's standpoint her unreasoning deductions appeared to him only as an affectation to gain time for thought, or a theatrical display, like Susy's. And he was turning half contemptuously away, when she again faced him with flashing eyes.

"Well, hear me! I accept; I leave here

at once, to join my own people, my own friends — those who understand me — put what construction on it that you choose. Do your worst; you cannot do more to separate us than you have done just now."

She left him, and ran up the steps with a singular return of her old occasional nymph-like nimbleness — the movement of a woman who had never borne children — and a swish of her long skirts that he remembered for many a day after, as she disappeared in the corridor. He remained looking after her — indignant, outraged, and unconvinced. There was a rattling at the gate.

He remembered he had locked it. He opened it to the flushed pink cheeks and dancing eyes of Susy. The rain was still dripping from her wet cloak as she swung it from her shoulders.

"I know it all! — all that 's happened," she burst out with half-girlish exuberance and half the actress's declamation. "We met them all in the road — posse and prisoners. Chief Thompson knew me and told me all. And so you 've done it — and you 're master in your old house again. Clarence, old boy! Jim said you would n't do it — said you 'd weaken on account of

her! But I said 'No.' I knew you better, old Clarence, and I saw it in your face, for all your stiffness! ha! But for all that I was mighty nervous and uneasy, and I just made Jim send an excuse to the theatre and we rushed it down here! Lordy! but it looks natural to see the old house again! And she — you packed her off with the others — did n't you? Tell me, Clarence," in her old appealing voice, "you shook her, too!"

Dazed and astounded, and yet experiencing a vague sense of relief with something like his old tenderness towards the willful woman before him, he had silently regarded her until her allusion to his wife recalled him to himself.

"Hush!" he said quickly, with a glance towards the corridor.

"Ah!" said Susy, with a malicious smile, "then that 's why Captain Pinckney was lingering in the rear with the deputy."

"Silence!" repeated Clarence sternly. "Go in there," pointing to the garden room below the balcony, "and wait there with your husband."

He half led, half pushed her into the room which had been his business office, and

returned to the patio. A hesitating voice from the balcony said, "Clarence!"

It was his wife's voice, but modified and gentler — more like her voice as he had first heard it, or as if it had been chastened by some reminiscence of those days. It was his wife's face, too, that looked down on his — paler than he had seen it since he entered the house. She was shawled and hooded, carrying a traveling-bag in her hand.

"I am going, Clarence," she said, pausing before him, with gentle gravity, "but not in anger. I even ask you to forgive me for the foolish words that I think your still more foolish accusation" — she smiled faintly — "dragged from me. I am going because I know that I have brought — and that while I am here I shall always be bringing — upon you the imputation and even the responsibility of my own faith! While I am proud to own it, — and if needs be suffer for it, — I have no right to ruin your prospects, or even make you the victim of the slurs that others may cast upon me. Let us part as friends — separated only by our different political faiths, but keeping all other faiths together — until God shall

settle the right of this struggle. Perhaps it may be soon — I sometimes think it may be years of agony for all; but until then, good-by."

She had slowly descended the steps to the patio, looking handsomer than he had ever seen her, and as if sustained and upheld by the enthusiasm of her cause. Her hand was outstretched towards his — his heart beat violently — in another moment he might have forgotten all and clasped her to his breast. Suddenly she stopped, her outstretched arm stiffened, her finger pointed to the chair on which Susy's cloak was hanging.

"What 's that?" she said in a sharp, high, metallic voice. "Who is here? Speak!"

"Susy," said Clarence.

She cast a scathing glance round the patio, and then settled her piercing eyes on Clarence with a bitter smile.

"Already!"

Clarence felt the blood rush to his face as he stammered, "She knew what was happening here, and came to give you warning."

"Liar!"

"Stop!" said Clarence, with a white face.

"She came to tell me that Captain Pinckney was still lingering for you in the road."

He threw open the gate to let her pass. As she swept out she lifted her hand. As he closed the gate there were the white marks of her four fingers on his cheek.

CHAPTER IV.

For once Susy had not exaggerated. Captain Pinckney *was* lingering, with the deputy who had charge of him, on the trail near the casa. It had already been pretty well understood by both captives and captors that the arrest was simply a legal demonstration; that the sympathizing Federal judge would undoubtedly order the discharge of the prisoners on their own recognizances, and it was probable that the deputy saw no harm in granting Pinckney's request — which was virtually only a delay in his liberation. It was also possible that Pinckney had worked upon the chivalrous sympathies of the man by professing his disinclination to leave their devoted colleague, Mrs. Brant, at the mercy of her antagonistic and cold-blooded husband at such a crisis, and it is to be feared also that Clarence, as a reputed lukewarm partisan, excited no personal sympathy, even from his own party. Howbeit, the deputy agreed to delay

Pinckney's journey for a parting interview with his fair hostess.

How far this expressed the real sentiments of Captain Pinckney was never known. Whether his political association with Mrs. Brant had developed into a warmer solicitude, understood or ignored by her, — what were his hopes and aspirations regarding her future, — were by the course of fate never disclosed. A man of easy ethics, but rigid artificialities of honor, flattered and pampered by class prejudice, a so-called "man of the world," with no experience beyond his own limited circle, yet brave and devoted to that, it were well perhaps to leave this last act of his inefficient life as it was accepted by the deputy.

Dismounting he approached the house from the garden. He was already familiar with the low arched doorway which led to the business room, and from which he could gain admittance to the patio, but it so chanced that he entered the dark passage at the moment that Clarence had thrust Susy into the business room, and heard its door shut sharply. For an instant he believed that Mrs. Brant had taken refuge there, but as he cautiously moved forward

he heard her voice in the patio beyond. Its accents struck him as pleading; an intense curiosity drew him further along the passage. Suddenly her voice seemed to change to angry denunciation, and the word "Liar" rang upon his ears. It was followed by his own name uttered sardonically by Clarence, the swift rustle of a skirt, the clash of the gate, and then — forgetting everything, he burst into the patio.

Clarence was just turning from the gate with the marks of his wife's hand still red on his white cheek. He saw Captain Pinckney's eyes upon it, and the faint, half-malicious, half-hysteric smile upon his lips. But without a start or gesture of surprise he locked the gate, and turning to him, said with frigid significance, —

"I thank you for returning so promptly, and for recognizing the only thing I now require at your hand."

But Captain Pinckney had recovered his supercilious ease with the significant demand.

"You seem to have had something already from another's hand, sir, but I am at your service," he said lightly.

"You will consider that I have accepted it from you," said Clarence, drawing closer

to him with a rigid face. "I suppose it will not be necessary for me to return it — to make you understand me."

"Go on," said Pinckney, flushing slightly. "Make your terms; I am ready."

"But I 'm not," said the unexpected voice of the deputy at the grille of the gateway. "Excuse my interfering, gentlemen, but this sort o' thing ain't down in my schedule. I 've let this gentleman," pointing to Captain Pinckney, "off for a minit to say 'good-by' to a lady, who I reckon has just ridden off in her buggy with her servant without saying by your leave, but I did n't calkelate to let him inter another business, which, like as not, may prevent me from delivering his body safe and sound into court. You hear me!" As Clarence opened the gate he added, "I don't want ter spoil sport between gents, but it 's got to come in after I 've done my duty."

"I 'll meet you, sir, anywhere, and with what weapons you choose," said Pinckney, turning angrily upon Clarence, "as soon as this farce — for which you and your friends are responsible — is over." He was furious at the intimation that Mrs. Brant had escaped him.

A different thought was in the husband's mind. "But what assurance have I that you are going on with the deputy?" he said with purposely insulting deliberation.

"My word, sir," said Captain Pinckney sharply.

"And if that ain't enuff, there 's mine!" said the deputy. "For if this gentleman swerves to the right or left betwixt this and Santa Inez, I 'll blow a hole through him myself. And that," he added deprecatingly, "is saying a good deal for a man who does n't want to spoil sport, and for the matter of that is willing to stand by and see fair play done at Santa Inez any time to-morrow before breakfast."

"Then I can count on you," said Clarence, with a sudden impulse extending his hand.

The man hesitated a moment and then grasped it.

"Well, I was n't expecting that," he said slowly; "but you look as if you meant business, and if you ain't got anybody else to see you through, I 'm thar! I suppose this gentleman will have his friends."

"I shall be there at six with my seconds," said Pinckney curtly. "Lead on."

The gate closed behind them. Clarence stood looking around the empty patio and the silent house, from which it was now plain that the servants had been withdrawn to insure the secrecy of the conspiracy. Cool and collected as he knew he was, he remained for a moment in hesitation. Then the sound of voices came to his ear from the garden room, the light frivolity of Susy's laugh and Hooker's huskier accents. He had forgotten they were there — he had forgotten their existence!

Trusting still to his calmness, he called to Hooker in his usual voice. That gentleman appeared with a face which his attempts to make unconcerned and impassive had, however, only deepened into funereal gravity.

"I have something to attend to," said Clarence, with a faint smile, "and I must ask you and Susy to excuse me for a little while. She knows the house perfectly, and will call the servants from the annex to provide you both with refreshment until I join you a little later." Satisfied from Hooker's manner that they knew nothing of his later interview with Pinckney, he turned away and ascended to his own room.

There he threw himself into an armchair by the dim light of a single candle as if to reflect. But he was conscious, even then, of his own calmness and want of excitement, and that no reflection was necessary. What he had done and what he intended to do was quite clear; there was no alternative suggested or to be even sought after. He had that sense of relief which comes with the climax of all great struggles, even of defeat.

He had never known before how hopeless and continuous had been that struggle until now it was over. He had no fear of to-morrow; he would meet it as he had to-day, with the same singular consciousness of being equal to the occasion. There was even no necessity of preparation for it; his will, leaving his fortune to his wife, — which seemed a slight thing now in this greater separation, — was already in his safe in San Francisco; his pistols were in the next room. He was even slightly disturbed by his own insensibility, and passed into his wife's bedroom partly in the hope of disturbing his serenity by some memento of their past. There was no disorder of flight — everything was in its place, except the drawer of

her desk, which was still open, as if she had taken something from it as an afterthought. There were letters and papers there, some of his own and some in Captain Pinckney's handwriting. It did not occur to him to look at them — even to justify himself, or excuse her. He knew that his hatred of Captain Pinckney was not so much that he believed him her lover, as his sudden conviction that she was like him! He was the male of her species — a being antagonistic to himself, whom he could fight, and crush, and revenge himself upon. But most of all he loathed his past, not on account of her, but of his own weakness that had made him her dupe and a misunderstood man to his friends. He had been derelict of duty in his unselfish devotion to her; he had stifled his ambition, and underrated his own possibilities. No wonder that others had accepted him at his own valuation. Clarence Brant was a modest man, but the egotism of modesty is more fatal than that of pretension, for it has the haunting consciousness of superior virtue.

He reëntered his own room and again threw himself into his chair. His calm was being succeeded by a physical weariness; he

remembered he had not slept the night before, and he ought to take some rest to be fresh in the early morning. Yet he must also show himself before his self-invited guests, — Susy and her husband, — or their suspicions would be aroused. He would try to sleep for a little while in the chair before he went downstairs again. He closed his eyes oddly enough on a dim dreamy recollection of Susy in the old days, in the little madroño hollow where she had once given him a rendezvous. He forgot the maturer and critical uneasiness with which he had then received her coquettish and willful advances, which he now knew was the effect of the growing dominance of Mrs. Peyton over him, and remembered only her bright, youthful eyes, and the kisses he had pressed upon her soft fragrant cheek. The faintness he had felt when waiting in the old rose garden, a few hours ago, seemed to steal on him once more, and to lapse into a pleasant drowsiness. He even seemed again to inhale the perfume of the roses.

"Clarence!"

He started. He had been sleeping, but the voice sounded strangely real.

A light, girlish laugh followed. He sprang

to his feet. It was Susy standing beside him — and Susy even as she looked in the old days!

For with a flash of her old audacity, aided by her familiar knowledge of the house and the bunch of household keys she had found, which dangled from her girdle, as in the old fashion, she had disinterred one of her old frocks from a closet, slipped it on, and unloosening her brown hair had let it fall in rippling waves down her back. It was Susy in her old girlishness, with the instinct of the grown actress in the arrangement of her short skirt over her pretty ankles and the half-conscious pose she had taken.

"Poor dear old Clarence," she said, with dancing eyes; "I might have won a dozen pairs of gloves from you while you slept there. But you 're tired, dear old boy, and you 've had a hard time of it. No matter; you 've shown yourself a man at last, and I 'm proud of you."

Half ashamed of the pleasure he felt even in his embarrassment, Clarence stammered, "But this change — this dress."

Susy clapped her hands like a child. "I knew it would surprise you! It 's an old frock I wore the year I went away with

auntie. I knew where it was hidden, and fished it out again with these keys, Clarence; it seemed so like old times. Lord! when I was with the old servants again, and you did n't come down, I just felt as if I 'd never been away, and I just rampaged free. It seemed to me, don't you know, not as if I 'd just come, but as if I 'd always been right here, and it was you who 'd just come. Don't you understand! Just as you came when me and Mary Rogers were here; don't you remember her, Clarence, and how she used to do 'gooseberry' for us? Well, just like that. So I said to Jim, 'I don't know you any more — get!' and I just slipped on this frock and ordered Manuela around as I used to do — and she in fits of laughter; I reckon, Clarence, she has n't laughed as much since I left. And then I thought of you — perhaps worried and flustered as yet over things, and the change, and I just slipped into the kitchen and I told old fat Conchita to make some of these tortillas you know, — with sugar and cinnamon sprinkled on top, — and I tied on an apron and brought 'em up to you on a tray with a glass of that old Catalan wine you used to like. Then I sorter felt frightened when I

got here, and I did n't hear any noise, and I put the tray down in the hall and peeped in and found you asleep. Sit still, I 'll fetch 'em."

She tripped out into the passage, returning with the tray, which she put on the table beside Clarence, and then standing back a little and with her hands tucked soubrette fashion in the tiny pockets of her apron, gazed at him with a mischievous smile.

It was impossible not to smile back as he nibbled the crisp Mexican cake and drank the old mission wine. And Susy's tongue trilled an accompaniment to his thanks.

"Lord! it seems so nice to be here — just you and me, Clarence — like in the old days — with nobody naggin' and swoopin' round after you. Don't be greedy, Clarence, but give me a cake." She took one and finished the dregs of his glass.

Then sitting on the arm of his chair, she darted a violet ray of half reproach and half mischievousness into his amused and retrospective eyes. "There used to be room for two in that chair, Klarns."

The use of the old childish diminutive for his name seemed to him natural as her familiarity, and he moved a little sideways

to make room for her with an instinct of pleasure, but the same sense of irresponsibility that had characterized his reflections. Nevertheless, he looked critically into the mischievous eyes, and said quietly, —

"Where is your husband?"

There was no trace of embarrassment, apology, or even of consciousness in her pretty face as she replied, passing her hand lightly through his hair, —

"Oh, Jim? I 've packed him off!"

"Packed him off!" echoed Clarence, slightly astonished.

"Yes, to Fair Plains, full tilt after your wife's buggy. You see, Clarence, after the old cat — that 's your wife, please — left, I wanted to make sure she had gone, and was n't hangin' round to lead you off again with your leg tied to her apron string like a chicken's! No! I said to Jim, 'Just you ride after her until you see she 's safe and sound in the down coach from Fair Plains without her knowin' it, and if she 's inclined to hang back or wobble any, you post back here and let me know!' I told him I would stay and look after you to see you did n't bolt too!" She laughed, and then added, "But I did n't think I should fall into the

old ways so soon, and have such a nice time. Did you, Clarence?"

She looked so irresponsible, sitting there with her face near his, and so childishly, or perhaps thoughtlessly, happy, that he could only admire her levity, and even the slight shock that her flippant allusion to his wife had given him seemed to him only a weakness of his own. After all, was not hers the true philosophy? Why should not these bright eyes see things more clearly than his own? Nevertheless, with his eyes still fixed upon them, he continued, —

"And Jim was willing to go?"

She stopped, with her fingers still lifting a lock of his hair. "Why, yes, you silly — why should n't he? I 'd like to see him refuse. Why, Lord! Jim will do anything I ask him." She put down the lock of hair, and suddenly looking full into his eyes, said, "That 's just the difference between him and me, and you and — that woman!"

"Then you love him!"

"About as much as you love her," she said, with an unaffected laugh; "only he don't wind me around his finger."

No doubt she was right for all her thoughtlessness, and yet he was going to fight about

that woman to-morrow! No — he forgot; he was going to fight Captain Pinckney because he was like her!

Susy had put her finger on the crease between his brows which this supposition had made, and tried to rub it out.

"You know it as well as I do, Clarence," she said, with a pretty wrinkling of her own brows, which was her nearest approach to thoughtfulness. "You know you never really liked her, only you thought her ways were grander and more proper than mine, and you know you were always a little bit of a snob and a prig too — dear boy. And Mrs. Peyton was — bless my soul! — a Benham and a planter's daughter, and I — I was only a picked-up orphan! That 's where Jim is better than you — now sit still, goosey! — even if I don't like him as much. Oh, I know what you 're always thinking, you 're thinking we 're both exaggerated and theatrical, ain't you? But don't you think it 's a heap better to be exaggerated and theatrical about things that are just sentimental and romantic than to be so awfully possessed and overcome about things that are only real? There, you need n't stare at me so! It 's true. You 've had your

fill of grandeur and propriety, and — here you are. And," she added with a little chuckle, as she tucked up her feet and leaned a little closer to him, "here 's *me.*"

He did not speak, but his arm quite unconsciously passed round her small waist.

"You see, Clarence," she went on with equal unconsciousness of the act, "you ought never to have let me go — never ! You ought to have kept me here — or run away with me. And you ought n't to have tried to make me proper. And you ought n't to have driven me to flirt with that horrid Spaniard, and you ought n't to have been so horribly cold and severe when I did. And you ought n't to have made me take up with Jim, who was the only one who thought me his equal. I might have been very silly and capricious; I might have been very vain, but my vanity is n't a bit worse than your pride; my love of praise and applause in the theatre is n't a bit more horrid than your fears of what people might think of you or me. That 's gospel truth, is n't it, Clarence? Tell me! Don't look that way and this — look at *me!* I ain't poisonous, Clarence. Why, one of your cheeks is redder than the other, Clarence; that 's the one

that 's turned from me. Come," she went on, taking the lapels of his coat between her hands and half shaking him, half drawing him nearer her bright face. "Tell me — is n't it true?"

"I was thinking of you just now when I fell asleep, Susy," he said. He did not know why he said it; he had not intended to tell her, he had only meant to avoid a direct answer to her question; yet even now he went on. "And I thought of you when I was out there in the rose garden waiting to come in here."

"You did?" she said, drawing in her breath. A wave of delicate pink color came up to her very eyes, it seemed to him as quickly and as innocently as when she was a girl. "And what *did* you think, Klarns," she half whispered — "tell me."

He did not speak, but answered her blue eyes and then her lips, as her arms slipped quite naturally around his neck.

. . . . . .

The dawn was breaking as Clarence and Jim Hooker emerged together from the gate of the casa. Mr. Hooker looked sleepy. He had found, after his return from Fair Plains, that his host had an early engage-

ment at Santa Inez, and he had insisted upon rising to see him off. It was with difficulty, indeed, that Clarence could prevent his accompanying him. Clarence had not revealed to Susy the night before the real object of his journey, nor did Hooker evidently suspect it, yet when the former had mounted his horse, he hesitated for an instant, extending his hand.

"If I should happen to be detained," he began with a half smile.

But Jim was struggling with a yawn. "That 's all right — don't mind us," he said, stretching his arms. Clarence's hesitating hand dropped to his side, and with a light reckless laugh and a half sense of providential relief he galloped away.

What happened immediately thereafter during his solitary ride to Santa Inez, looking back upon it in after years, seemed but a confused recollection, more like a dream. The long stretches of vague distance, gradually opening clearer with the rising sun in an unclouded sky; the meeting with a few early or belated travelers and his unconscious avoidance of them, as if they might know of his object; the black shadows of foreshortened cattle rising before him on the

plain and arousing the same uneasy sensation of their being waylaying men; the wondering recognition of houses and landmarks he had long been familiar with; his purposeless attempts to recall the circumstances in which he had known them — all these were like a dream. So, too, were the recollections of the night before, the episode with Susy, already mingled and blended with the memory of their previous past; his futile attempts to look forward to the future, always, however, abandoned with relief at the thought that the next few hours might make them unnecessary. So also was the sudden realization that Santa Inez was before him, when he had thought he was not yet halfway there, and as he dismounted before the Court House his singular feeling — followed, however, by no fear or distress — was that he had come so early to the rendezvous that he was not yet quite prepared for it.

This same sense of unreality pervaded his meeting with the deputy sheriff, at the news that the Federal judge had, as was expected, dismissed the prisoners on their own recognizances, and that Captain Pinckney was at the hotel at breakfast. In the like ab-

stracted manner he replied to the one or two questions of the deputy, exhibited the pistols he had brought with him, and finally accompanied him to a little meadow hidden by trees, below the hotel, where the other principal and his seconds were awaiting them. And here he awoke — clear-eyed, keen, forceful, and intense!

So stimulated were his faculties that his sense of hearing in its acuteness took in every word of the conversation between the seconds, a few paces distant. He heard his adversary's seconds say carelessly to the deputy sheriff, "I presume this is a case where there will be no apology or mediation," and the deputy's reply, "I reckon my man means business, but he seems a little queer." He heard the other second laugh, and say lightly, "They 're apt to be so when it 's their first time out," followed by the more anxious aside of the other second as the deputy turned away, — "Yes, but by G—d I don't like his looks!" His sense of sight was also so acute that having lost the choice of position, when the coin was tossed, and being turned with his face to the sun, even through the glare he saw, with unerring distinctness of outline, the black-coated

figure of his opponent moved into range — saw the perfect outline of his features, and how the easy, supercilious smile, as he threw away his cigar, appeared to drop out of his face with a kind of vacant awe as he faced him. He felt his nerves become as steel as the counting began, and at the word "three," knew he had fired by the recoil of the pistol in his leveled hand, simultaneously with its utterance. And at the same moment, still standing like a rock, he saw his adversary miserably collapse, his legs grotesquely curving inwards under him, — without even the dignity of death in his fall, — and so sink helplessly like a felled bull to the ground. Still erect, and lowering only the muzzle of his pistol, as a thin feather of smoke curled up its shining side, he saw the doctor and seconds run quickly to the heap, try to lift its limp impotence into shape, and let it drop again with the words, "Right through the forehead, by G—d!"

"You 've done for him," said the deputy, turning to Clarence with a singular look of curiosity, "and I reckon you had better get out of this mighty quick. They did n't expect it; they 're just ragin'; they may

round on you — and" — he added, more slowly, "they seem to have just found out who you are."

Even while he was speaking, Clarence, with his quickened ear, heard the words, "One of Hamilton Brant's pups" "Just like his father," from the group around the dead man. He did not hesitate, but walked coolly towards them. Yet a certain fierce pride — which he had never known before — stirred in his veins as their voices hushed and they half recoiled before him.

"Am I to understand from my second, gentlemen," he said, looking round the group, "that you are not satisfied?"

"The fight was square enough," said Pinckney's second in some embarrassment, "but I reckon that he," pointing to the dead man, "did not know who you were."

"Do you mean that he did not know that I was the son of a man proficient in the use of arms?"

"I reckon that 's about it," returned the second, glancing at the others.

"I am glad to say, sir, that I have a better opinion of his courage," said Clarence, lifting his hat to the dead body as he turned away.

Yet he was conscious of no remorse, concern, or even pity in his act. Perhaps this was visible in his face, for the group appeared awed by this perfection of the duelist's coolness, and even returned his formal parting salutation with a vague and timid respect. He thanked the deputy, regained the hotel, saddled his horse and galloped away.

But not towards the Rancho. Now that he could think of his future, that had no place in his reflections; even the episode of Susy was forgotten in the new and strange conception of himself and his irresponsibility which had come upon him with the killing of Pinckney and the words of his second. It was his dead father who had stiffened his arm and directed the fatal shot! It was hereditary influences — which others had been so quick to recognize — that had brought about this completing climax of his trouble. How else could he account for it that he — a conscientious, peaceful, sensitive man, tender and forgiving as he had believed himself to be — could now feel so little sorrow or compunction for his culminating act? He had read of successful duelists who were haunted by remorse

for their first victim; who retained a terrible consciousness of the appearance of the dead man; he had no such feeling; he had only a grim contentment in the wiped-out inefficient life, and contempt for the limp and helpless body. He suddenly recalled his callousness as a boy when face to face with the victims of the Indian massacre, his sense of fastidious superciliousness in the discovery of the body of Susy's mother! — surely it was the cold blood of his father influencing him ever thus. What had he to do with affection, with domestic happiness, with the ordinary ambitions of man's life — whose blood was frozen at its source! Yet even with this very thought came once more the old inconsistent tenderness he had as a boy lavished upon the almost unknown and fugitive father who had forsaken his childish companionship, and remembered him only by secret gifts. He remembered how he had worshiped him even while the pious padres at San José were endeavoring to eliminate this terrible poison from his blood and combat his hereditary instinct in his conflicts with his school-fellows. And it was a part of this inconsistency that, riding away from the scene of his first bloodshed,

his eyes were dimmed with moisture, not for his victim, but for the one being who he believed had impelled him to the act.

This and more was in his mind during his long ride to Fair Plains, his journey by coach to the Embarcadero, his midnight passage across the dark waters of the bay, and his reëntrance to San Francisco, but what should be his future was still unsettled.

As he wound round the crest of Russian Hill and looked down again upon the awakened city, he was startled to see that it was fluttering and streaming with bunting. From every public building and hotel, from the roofs of private houses, and even the windows of lonely dwellings, flapped and waved the striped and starry banner. The steady breath of the sea carried it out from masts and yards of ships at their wharves, from the battlements of the forts Alcatraz and Yerba Bueno. He remembered that the ferryman had told him that the news from Fort Sumter had swept the city with a revulsion of patriotic sentiment, and that there was no doubt that the State was saved to the Union. He looked down upon it

with haggard, bewildered eyes, and then a strange gasp and fullness of the throat! For afar a solitary bugle had blown the "reveille" at Fort Alcatraz.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

Night at last, and the stir and tumult of a great fight over. Even the excitement that had swept this portion of the battle-field — only a small section of a vaster area of struggle — into which a brigade had marched, held its own, been beaten back, recovered its ground, and pursuing, had passed out of it forever, leaving only its dead behind, and knowing nothing more of that struggle than its own impact and momentum — even this wild excitement had long since evaporated with the stinging smoke of gunpowder, the acrid smell of burning rags from the clothing of a dead soldier fired by a bursting shell, or the heated reek of sweat and leather. A cool breath that seemed to bring back once more the odor of the upturned earthworks along the now dumb line of battle began to move from the suggestive darkness beyond.

But into that awful penetralia of death

and silence there was no invasion — there had been no retreat. A few of the wounded had been brought out, under fire, but the others had been left with the dead for the morning light and succor. For it was known that in that horrible obscurity, riderless horses, frantic with the smell of blood, galloped wildly here and there, or, maddened by wounds, plunged furiously at the intruder ; that the wounded soldier, still armed, could not always distinguish friend from foe or from the ghouls of camp followers who stripped the dead in the darkness and struggled with the dying. A shot or two heard somewhere in that obscurity counted as nothing with the long fusillade that had swept it in the daytime; the passing of a single life, more or less, amounted to little in the long roll-call of the day's slaughter.

But with the first beams of the morning sun — and the slowly moving "relief detail" from the camp — came a weird half-resurrection of that ghastly field. Then it was that the long rays of sunlight, streaming away a mile beyond the battle line, pointed out the first harvest of the dead where the reserves had been posted. There they lay in heaps and piles, killed by solid shot or

bursting shells that had leaped the battle line to plunge into the waiting ranks beyond. As the sun lifted higher its beams fell within the range of musketry fire, where the dead lay thicker, — even as they had fallen when killed outright, — with arms extended and feet at all angles to the field. As it touched these dead upturned faces, strangely enough it brought out no expression of pain or anguish — but rather as if death had arrested them only in surprise and awe. It revealed on the lips of those who had been mortally wounded and had turned upon their side the relief which death had brought their suffering, sometimes shown in a faint smile. Mounting higher, it glanced upon the actual battle line, curiously curving for the shelter of walls, fences, and breastworks, and here the dead lay, even as when they lay and fired, their faces prone in the grass but their muskets still resting across the breastworks. Exposed to grape and canister from the battery on the ridge, death had come to them mercifully also — through the head and throat. And now the whole field lay bare in the sunlight, broken with grotesque shadows cast from sitting, crouching, half-recumbent but always rigid

figures, which might have been effigies on their own monuments. One half-kneeling soldier, with head bowed between his stiffened hands, might have stood for a carven figure of Grief at the feet of his dead comrade. A captain, shot through the brain in the act of mounting a wall, lay sideways half across it, his lips parted with a word of command; his sword still pointing over the barrier the way that they should go.

But it was not until the sun had mounted higher that it struck the central horror of the field and seemed to linger there in dazzling persistence, now and then returning to it in startling flashes that it might be seen of men and those who brought succor. A tiny brook had run obliquely near the battle line. It was here that, the night before the battle, friend and foe had filled their canteens side by side with soldierly recklessness — or perhaps a higher instinct — purposely ignoring each other's presence; it was here that the wounded had afterwards crept, crawled, and dragged themselves; here they had pushed, wrangled, striven, and fought for a draught of that precious fluid which assuaged the thirst of their wounds — or happily put them out of their

misery forever; here overborne, crushed, suffocated by numbers, pouring their own blood into the flood, and tumbling after it with their helpless bodies, they dammed the stream, until recoiling, red and angry, it had burst its banks and overflowed the cotton-field in a broad pool that now sparkled in the sunlight. But below this human dam — a mile away — where the brook still crept sluggishly, the ambulance horses sniffed and started from it.

The detail moved on slowly, doing their work expeditiously, and apparently callously, but really only with that mechanical movement that saves emotion. Only once they were moved to an outbreak of indignation, — the discovery of the body of an officer whose pockets were turned inside out, but whose hand was still tightly grasped on his buttoned waistcoat, as if resisting the outrage that had been done while still in life. As the men disengaged the stiffened hand something slipped from the waistcoat to the ground. The corporal picked it up and handed it to his officer. It was a sealed packet. The officer received it with the carelessness which long experience of these pathetic missives from the dying to their liv-

ing relations had induced, and dropped it in the pocket of his tunic, with the half-dozen others that he had picked up that morning, and moved on with the detail. A little further on they halted, in the attitude of attention, as a mounted officer appeared, riding slowly down the line.

There was something more than the habitual respect of their superior in their faces as he came forward. For it was the general who had commanded the brigade the day before, — the man who had leaped with one bound into the foremost rank of military leaders. It was his invincible spirit that had led the advance, held back defeat against overwhelming numbers, sustained the rally, impressed his subordinate officers with his own undeviating purpose, and even infused them with an almost superstitious belief in his destiny of success. It was this man who had done what it was deemed impossible to do, — what even at the time it was thought unwise and unstrategic to do, — who had held a weak position, of apparently no importance, under the mandate of an incomprehensible order from his superior, which at best asked only for a sacrifice and was rewarded with a victory. He had de-

cimated his brigade, but the wounded and dying had cheered him as he passed, and the survivors had pursued the enemy until the bugle called them back. For such a record he looked still too young and scholarly, albeit his handsome face was dark and energetic, and his manner taciturn.

His quick eye had already caught sight of the rifled body of the officer, and contracted. As the captain of the detail saluted him he said curtly, —

"I thought the orders were to fire upon any one desecrating the dead?"

"They are, General; but the hyenas don't give us a chance. That 's all yonder poor fellow saved from their claws," replied the officer, as he held up the sealed packet. "It has no address."

The general took it, examined the envelope, thrust it into his belt, and said, —

"I will take charge of it."

The sound of horses' hoofs came from the rocky roadside beyond the brook. Both men turned. A number of field officers were approaching.

"The division staff," said the captain, in a lower voice, falling back.

They came slowly forward, a central

figure on a gray horse leading here — as in history. A short, thick-set man with a grizzled beard closely cropped around an inscrutable mouth, and the serious formality of a respectable country deacon in his aspect, which even the major-general's blazon on the shoulder-strap of his loose tunic on his soldierly seat in the saddle could not entirely obliterate. He had evidently perceived the general of brigade, and quickened his horse as the latter drew up. The staff followed more leisurely, but still with some curiosity, to witness the meeting of the first general of the army with the youngest. The division general saluted, but almost instantly withdrew his leathern gauntlet, and offered his bared hand to the brigadier. The words of heroes are scant. The drawn-up detail, the waiting staff listened. This was all they heard: —

"Halleck tells me you 're from California?"

"Yes, General."

"Ah! I lived there, too, in the early days. Wonderful country. Developed greatly since my time, I suppose?"

"Yes, General."

"Great resources; finest wheat-growing

country in the world, sir. You don't happen to know what the actual crop was this year?"

"Hardly, General! but something enormous."

"Yes, I have always said it would be. Have a cigar?"

He handed his cigar-case to the brigadier. Then he took one himself, lighted it at the smouldering end of the one he had taken from his mouth, was about to throw the stump carelessly down, but, suddenly recollecting himself, leaned over his horse, and dropped it carefully a few inches away from the face of a dead soldier. Then, straightening himself in the saddle, he shoved his horse against the brigadier, moving him a little further on, while a slight movement of his hand kept the staff from following.

"A heavy loss here!"

"I 'm afraid so, General."

"It could n't be helped. We had to rush in your brigade to gain time, and occupy the enemy, until we could change front."

The young general looked at the shrewd, cold eyes of his chief.

"Change front?" he echoed.

"Yes. Before a gun was fired, we discovered that the enemy was in complete possession of all our plans, and knew every detail of our forward movement. All had to be changed."

The younger man now instantly understood the incomprehensible order of the day before.

The general of division continued, with his first touch of official formality, —

"You understand, therefore, General Brant, that in the face of this extraordinary treachery, the utmost vigilance is required, and a complete surveillance of your camp followers and civilians, to detect the actual spy within our lines, or the traitor we are harboring, who has become possessed of this information. You will overhaul your brigade, and weed out all suspects, and in the position which you are to take to-morrow, and the plantation you will occupy, you will see that your private quarters, as well as your lines, are cleared of all but those you can vouch for."

He reined in his horse, again extended his hand, saluted, and rejoined his staff.

Brigadier-General Clarence Brant remained for a moment with his head bent in

thoughtful contemplation of the coolness of his veteran chief under this exciting disclosure, and the strategy with which he had frustrated the traitor's success. Then his eye caught the sealed packet in his belt. He mechanically drew it out, and broke the seal. The envelope was filled with papers and memorandums. But as he looked at them his face darkened and his brow knit. He glanced quickly around him. The staff had trotted away; the captain and his detail were continuing their work at a little distance. He took a long breath, for he was holding in his hand a tracing of their camp, even of the position he was to occupy tomorrow, and a detailed account of the movements, plans, and force of the whole division as had been arranged in council of war the day before the battle! But there was no indication of the writer or his intentions.

He thrust the papers hurriedly back into the envelope, but placed it, this time, in his breast. He galloped towards the captain.

"Let me see again the officer from whom you took that packet!"

The captain led him to where the body lay, with others, extended more decently on

the grass awaiting removal. General Brant with difficulty repressed an ejaculation.

"Why, it 's one of our own men," he said quickly.

"Yes, General. They say it 's Lieutenant Wainwright, a regular, of the paymaster-general's department."

"Then what was he doing here?" asked General Brant sternly.

"I can't make out, sir, unless he went into the last advance as a volunteer. Wanted to see the fight, I suppose. He was a dashing fellow, a West Pointer, — and a Southerner, too, — a Virginian."

"A Southerner!" echoed Brant quickly.

"Yes, sir."

"Search him again," said Brant quietly. He had recovered his usual coolness, and as the captain again examined the body, he took out his tablets and wrote a few lines. It was an order to search the quarters of Lieutenant Wainwright and bring all papers, letters, and documents to him. He then beckoned one of the detail towards him. "Take that to the provost marshal at once. Well, Captain," he added calmly, as the officer again approached him, "what do you find?"

"Only this, sir," returned the captain, with a half smile, producing a small photograph. "I suppose it was overlooked, too."

He handed it to Brant.

There was a sudden fixing of his commanding officer's eyes, but his face did not otherwise change.

"It 's the usual find, General. Always a photograph! But this time a handsome woman!"

"Very," said Clarence Brant quietly. It was the portrait of his own wife.

CHAPTER II.

Nevertheless, so complete was his control of voice and manner that, as he rode on to his quarters, no one would have dreamed that General Brant had just looked upon the likeness of the wife from whom he had parted in anger four years ago. Still less would they have suspected the strange fear that came upon him that in some way she was connected with the treachery he had just discovered. He had heard from her only once, and then through her late husband's lawyer, in regard to her Californian property, and believed that she had gone to her relations in Alabama, where she had identified herself with the Southern cause, even to the sacrifice of her private fortune. He had heard her name mentioned in the Southern press as a fascinating society leader, and even coadjutrix of Southern politicians, — but he had no reason to believe that she had taken so active or so desperate a part in the struggle. He tried to

think that his uneasiness sprang from his recollection of the previous treachery of Captain Pinckney, and the part that she had played in the Californian conspiracy, although he had long since acquitted her of the betrayal of any nearer trust. But there was a fateful similarity in the two cases. There was no doubt that this Lieutenant Wainwright was a traitor in the camp, — that he had succumbed to the usual sophistry of his class in regard to his superior allegiance to his native State. But was there the inducement of another emotion, or was the photograph only the souvenir of a fascinating priestess of rebellion, whom the dead man had met? There was perhaps less of feeling than scorn in the first suggestion, but he was nevertheless relieved when the provost marshal found no other incriminating papers in Wainwright's effects. Nor did he reveal to the division general the finding of the photograph. It was sufficient to disclose the work of the traitor without adding what might be a clue to his wife's participation in it, near or remote. There was risk enough in the former course, — which his duty made imperative. He hardly dared to think of the past day's slaughter,

which — there was no doubt now — had been due to the previous work of the spy, and how his brigade had been selected — by the irony of Fate — to suffer for and yet retrieve it. If she had had a hand in this wicked plot, ought he to spare her? Or was his destiny and hers to be thus monstrously linked together?

Luckily, however, the expiation of the chief offender and the timely discovery of his papers enabled the division commander to keep the affair discreetly silent, and to enjoin equal secrecy on the part of Brant. The latter, however, did not relax his vigilance, and after the advance the next day he made a minute inspection of the ground he was to occupy, its approaches and connections with the outlying country, and the rebel lines; increased the stringency of picket and sentry regulations, and exercised a rigid surveillance of non-combatants and civilians within the lines, even to the lowest canteener or camp follower. Then he turned his attention to the house he was to occupy as his headquarters.

It was a fine specimen of the old colonial planter's house, with its broad veranda, its great detached offices and negro quarters,

and had, thus far, escaped the ravages and billeting of the war. It had been occupied by its owner up to a few days before the engagement, and so great had been the confidence of the enemy in their success that it had been used as the Confederate headquarters on the morning of the decisive battle. Jasmine and rose, unstained by the sulphur of gunpowder, twined around its ruined columns and half hid the recessed windows; the careless flower garden was still in its unkempt and unplucked luxuriance; the courtyard before the stables alone showed marks of the late military occupancy, and was pulverized by the uneasy horse-hoofs of the waiting staff. But the mingled impress of barbaric prodigality with patriarchal simplicity was still there in the domestic arrangements of a race who lived on half equal familiarity with strangers and their own servants.

The negro servants still remained, with a certain cat-like fidelity to the place, and adapted themselves to the Northern invaders with a childlike enjoyment of the novelty of change. Brant, nevertheless, looked them over with an experienced eye, and satisfied himself of their trustworthiness; there was the usual number of "boys," gray-haired

and grizzled in body service, and the "mammys" and "aunties" of the kitchen. There were two or three rooms in the wing which still contained private articles, pictures and souvenirs of the family, and a "young lady's" boudoir, which Brant, with characteristic delicacy, kept carefully isolated and intact from his military household, and accessible only to the family servants. The room he had selected for himself was nearest it, — a small, plainly furnished apartment, with an almost conventual simplicity in its cold, white walls and draperies, and the narrow, nun-like bed. It struck him that it might have belonged to some prim elder daughter or maiden aunt, who had acted as housekeeper, as it commanded the wing and servants' offices, with easy access to the central hall.

There followed a week of inactivity in which Brant felt a singular resemblance in this Southern mansion to the old casa at Robles. The afternoon shadows of the deep verandas recalled the old monastic gloom of the Spanish house, which even the presence of a lounging officer or waiting orderly could not entirely dissipate, and the scent of the rose and jasmine from his windows

overcame him with sad memories. He began to chafe under this inaction, and long again for the excitement of the march and bivouac, — in which, for the past four years, he had buried his past.

He was sitting one afternoon alone before his reports and dispatches, when this influence seemed so strong that he half impulsively laid them aside to indulge in a long reverie. He was recalling his last day at Robles, the early morning duel with Pinckney, the return to San Francisco, and the sudden resolution which sent him that day across the continent to offer his services to the Government. He remembered his delay in the Western town, where a volunteer regiment was being recruited, his entrance into it as a private, his rapid selection, through the force of his sheer devotion and intelligent concentration, to the captaincy of his company; his swift promotion on hard-fought fields to the head of the regiment, and the singular success that had followed his resistless energy, which left him no time to think of anything but his duty. The sudden intrusion of his wife upon his career now, even in this accidental and perhaps innocent way, had seriously unsettled him.

The shadows were growing heavier and deeper, it lacked only a few moments of the sunset bugle, when he was recalled to himself by that singular instinctive consciousness, common to humanity, of being intently looked at. He turned quickly, — the door behind him closed softly. He rose and slipped into the hall. The tall figure of a woman was going down the passage. She was erect and graceful; but, as she turned towards the door leading to the offices, he distinctly saw the gaudily turbaned head and black silhouette of a negress. Nevertheless, he halted a moment at the door of the next room.

"See who that woman is who has just passed, Mr. Martin. She does n't seem to belong to the house."

The young officer rose, put on his cap, and departed. In a few moments he returned.

"Was she tall, sir, of a good figure, and very straight?"

"Yes."

"She is a servant of our neighbors, the Manlys, who occasionally visits the servants here. A mulatto, I think."

Brant reflected. Many of the mulattoes and negresses were of good figure, and the

habit of carrying burdens on their heads gave them a singularly erect carriage.

The lieutenant looked at his chief.

"Have you any orders to give concerning her, General?"

"No," said Brant, after a moment's pause, and turned away.

The officer smiled. It seemed a good story to tell at mess of this human weakness of his handsome, reserved, and ascetic-looking leader.

A few mornings afterwards Brant was interrupted over his reports by the almost abrupt entrance of the officer of the day. His face was flushed, and it was evident that only the presence of his superior restrained his excitement. He held a paper in his hand.

"A lady presents this order and pass from Washington, countersigned by the division general."

"A lady?"

"Yes, sir, she is dressed as such. But she has not only declined the most ordinary civilities and courtesies we have offered her, but she has insulted Mr. Martin and myself grossly, and demands to be shown to you — alone."

Brant took the paper. It was a special order from the President, passing Miss Matilda Faulkner through the Federal lines to visit her uncle's home, known as "Gray Oaks," now held and occupied as the headquarters of Brant's Brigade, in order to arrange for the preservation and disposal of certain family effects and private property that still remained there, or to take and carry away such property; and invoking all necessary aid and assistance from the United States forces in such occupancy. It was countersigned by the division commander. It was perfectly regular and of undoubted authenticity. He had heard of passes of this kind, — the terror of the army, — issued in Washington under some strange controlling influence and against military protest; but he did not let his subordinate see the uneasiness with which it filled him.

"Show her in," he said quietly.

But she had already entered, brushing scornfully past the officer, and drawing her skirt aside, as if contaminated: a very pretty Southern girl, scornful and red-lipped, clad in a gray riding-habit, and still carrying her riding-whip clenched ominously in her slim, gauntleted hand!

"You have my permit in your hand," she said brusquely, hardly raising her eyes to Brant. "I suppose it 's all straight enough, — and even if it is n't, I don't reckon to be kept waiting with those hirelings."

" Your ' permit ' is ' straight ' enough, Miss Faulkner," said Brant, slowly reading her name from the document before him. "But, as it does not seem to include permission to insult my officers, you will perhaps allow them first to retire."

He made a sign to the officer, who passed out of the door.

As it closed, he went on, in a gentle but coldly unimpassioned voice, —

"I perceive you are a Southern lady, and therefore I need not remind you that it is not considered good form to treat even the slaves of those one does not like uncivilly, and I must, therefore, ask you to keep your active animosity for myself."

The young girl lifted her eyes. She had evidently not expected to meet a man so young, so handsome, so refined, and so coldly invincible in manner. Still less was she prepared for that kind of antagonism. In keeping up her preconcerted attitude towards the " Northern hireling," she had

been met with official brusqueness, contemptuous silence, or aggrieved indignation, — but nothing so exasperating as this. She even fancied that this elegant but sardonic-looking soldier was mocking her. She bit her red lip, but, with a scornful gesture of her riding-whip, said, —

"I reckon that your knowledge of Southern ladies is, for certain reasons, not very extensive."

"Pardon me; I have had the honor of marrying one."

Apparently more exasperated than before, she turned upon him abruptly.

"You say my pass is all right. Then I presume I may attend to the business that brought me here."

"Certainly; but you will forgive me if I imagined that an expression of contempt for your hosts was a part of it."

He rang a bell on the table. It was responded to by an orderly.

"Send all the household servants here."

The room was presently filled with the dusky faces of the negro retainers. Here and there was the gleaming of white teeth, but a majority of the assembly wore the true negro serious acceptance of the importance

of "an occasion." One or two even affected an official and soldierly bearing. And, as he fully expected, there were several glances of significant recognition of the stranger.

"You will give," said Brant sternly, "every aid and attention to the wants of this young lady, who is here to represent the interests of your old master. As she will be entirely dependent upon you in all things connected with her visit here, see to it that she does not have to complain to me of any inattention, — or be obliged to ask for other assistance."

As Miss Faulkner, albeit a trifle paler in the cheek, but as scornful as ever, was about to follow the servants from the room, Brant stopped her, with a coldly courteous gesture.

"You will understand, therefore, Miss Faulkner, that you have your wish, and that you will not be exposed to any contact with the members of my military family, nor they with you."

"Am I then to be a prisoner in this house — and under a free pass of your — President?" she said indignantly.

"By no means! You are free to come and go, and see whom you please. I have no power to control your actions. But I have the power to control theirs."

She swept furiously from the room.

"That is quite enough to fill her with a desire to flirt with every man here," said Brant to himself, with a faint smile; "but I fancy they have had a taste enough of her quality."

Nevertheless he sat down and wrote a few lines to the division commander, pointing out that he had already placed the owner's private property under strict surveillance, that it was cared for and perfectly preserved by the household servants, and that the pass was evidently obtained as a subterfuge.

To this he received a formal reply, regretting that the authorities at Washington still found it necessary to put this kind of risk and burden on the army in the field, but that the order emanated from the highest authority, and must be strictly obeyed. At the bottom of the page was a characteristic line in pencil in the general's own hand — "Not the kind that is dangerous."

A flush mounted Brant's cheeks, as if it contained not only a hidden, but a personal significance. He had thought of his own wife!

Singularly enough, a day or two later, at dinner, the conversation turned upon the in-

tense sectional feeling of Southern women, probably induced by their late experiences. Brant, at the head of the table, in his habitual abstraction, was scarcely following the somewhat excited diction of Colonel Strangeways, one of his staff.

"No, sir," reiterated that indignant warrior, "take my word for it! A Southern woman is n't to be trusted on this point, whether as a sister, sweetheart, or wife. And when she *is* trusted, she 's bound to get the better of the man in any of those relations ! "

The dead silence that followed, the ominous joggle of a glass at the speaker's elbow, the quick, sympathetic glance that Brant instinctively felt was directed at his own face, and the abrupt change of subject, could not but arrest his attention, even if he had overlooked the speech. His face, however, betrayed nothing. It had never, however, occurred to him before that his family affairs might be known — neither had he ever thought of keeping them a secret. It seemed so purely a personal and private misfortune, that he had never dreamed of its having any public interest. And even now he was a little ashamed of what he be-

lieved was his sensitiveness to mere conventional criticism, which, with the instinct of a proud man, he had despised.

He was not far wrong in his sardonic intuition of the effect of his prohibition upon Miss Faulkner's feelings. Certainly that young lady, when not engaged in her mysterious occupation of arranging her uncle's effects, occasionally was seen in the garden, and in the woods beyond. Although her presence was the signal for the "oblique" of any lounging "shoulder strap," or the vacant "front" of a posted sentry, she seemed to regard their occasional proximity with less active disfavor. Once, when she had mounted the wall to gather a magnolia blossom, the chair by which she had ascended rolled over, leaving her on the wall. At a signal from the guard-room, two sappers and miners appeared carrying a scaling-ladder, which they placed silently against the wall, and as silently withdrew. On another occasion, the same spirited young lady, whom Brant was satisfied would have probably imperiled her life under fire in devotion to her cause, was brought ignominiously to bay in the field by that most appalling of domestic animals, the wander-

ing and untrammeled cow! Brant could not help smiling as he heard the quick, harsh call to "Turn out, guard," saw the men march stolidly with fixed bayonets to the vicinity of the affrighted animal, who fled, leaving the fair stranger to walk shamefacedly to the house. He was surprised, however, that she should have halted before his door, and with tremulous indignation, said, —

"I thank you, sir, for your chivalrousness in turning a defenseless woman into ridicule."

"I regret, Miss Faulkner," began Brant gravely, "that you should believe that I am able to control the advances of farmyard cattle as easily as" — But he stopped, as he saw that the angry flash of her blue eyes, as she darted past him, was set in tears. A little remorseful on the following day, he added a word to his ordinary cap-lifting when she went by, but she retained a reproachful silence. Later in the day, he received from her servant a respectful request for an interview, and was relieved to find that she entered his presence with no trace of her former aggression, but rather with the resignation of a deeply injured, yet not entirely unforgiving, woman.

"I thought," she began coldly, "that I ought to inform you that I would probably be able to conclude my business here by the day after to-morrow, and that you would then be relieved of my presence. I am aware — indeed," she added, bitterly, "I could scarcely help perceiving, that it has been an exceedingly irksome one."

"I trust," began Brant coldly, "that no gentleman of my command has" —

"No!"

She interrupted him quickly, with a return of her former manner, and a passionate sweep of the hand.

"Do you suppose for a moment that I am speaking — that I am even thinking — of them? What are they to me?"

"Thank you. I am glad to know that they are nothing; and that I may now trust that you have consulted my wishes, and have reserved your animosity solely for me," returned Brant quietly. "That being so, I see no reason for your hurrying your departure in the least."

She rose instantly.

"I have," she said slowly, controlling herself with a slight effort, "found some one who will take my duty off my hands. She

is a servant of one of your neighbors, — who is an old friend of my uncle's. The woman is familiar with the house, and our private property. I will give her full instructions to act for me, and even an authorization in writing, if you prefer it. She is already in the habit of coming here; but her visits will give you very little trouble. And, as she is a slave, or, as you call it, I believe, a chattel, she will be already quite accustomed to the treatment which her class are in the habit of receiving from Northern hands."

Without waiting to perceive the effect of her Parthian shot, she swept proudly out of the room.

"I wonder what she means," mused Brant, as her quick step died away in the passage. "One thing is certain, — a woman like that is altogether too impulsive for a spy."

Later, in the twilight, he saw her walking in the garden. There was a figure at her side. A little curious, he examined it more closely from his window. It was already familiar to him, — the erect, shapely form of his neighbor's servant. A thoughtful look passed over his face as he muttered, — "So this is to be her deputy."

CHAPTER III.

CALLED to a general council of officers at divisional headquarters the next day, Brant had little time for further speculation regarding his strange guest, but a remark from the division commander, that he preferred to commit the general plan of a movement then under discussion to their memories rather than to written orders in the ordinary routine, seemed to show that his chief still suspected the existence of a spy. He, therefore, told him of his late interview with Miss Faulkner, and her probable withdrawal in favor of a mulatto neighbor. The division commander received the information with indifference.

"They 're much too clever to employ a hussy like that, who shows her hand at every turn, either as a spy or a messenger of spies,— and the mulattoes are too stupid, to say nothing of their probable fidelity to us. No, General, if we are watched, it is by an eagle, and not a mocking-bird. Miss

Faulkner has nothing worse about her than her tongue; and there is n't the nigger blood in the whole South that would risk a noose for her, or for any of their masters or mistresses!"

It was, therefore, perhaps, with some mitigation of his usual critical severity that he saw her walking before him alone in the lane as he rode home to quarters. She was apparently lost in a half-impatient, half-moody reverie, which even the trotting hoof-beats of his own and his orderly's horse had not disturbed. From time to time she struck the myrtle hedge beside her with the head of a large flower which hung by its stalk from her listless hands, or held it to her face as if to inhale its perfume. Dismissing his orderly by a side path, he rode gently forward, but, to his surprise, without turning, or seeming to be aware of his presence, she quickened her pace, and even appeared to look from side to side for some avenue of escape. If only to mend matters, he was obliged to ride quickly forward to her side, where he threw himself from his horse, flung the reins on his arm, and began to walk beside her. She at first turned a slightly flushed cheek away from him, and

then looked up with a purely simulated start of surprise.

"I am afraid," he said gently, "that I am the first to break my own orders in regard to any intrusion on your privacy. But I wanted to ask you if I could give you any aid whatever in the change you think of making."

He was quite sincere, — had been touched by her manifest disturbance, and, despite his masculine relentlessness of criticism, he had an intuition of feminine suffering that was in itself feminine.

"Meaning, that you are in a hurry to get rid of me," she said curtly, without raising her eyes.

"Meaning that I only wish to expedite a business which I think is unpleasant to you, but which I believe you have undertaken from unselfish devotion."

The scant expression of a reserved nature is sometimes more attractive to women than the most fluent vivacity. Possibly there was also a melancholy grace in this sardonic soldier's manner that affected her, for she looked up, and said impulsively, —

"You think so?"

But he met her eager eyes with some surprise.

"I certainly do," he replied more coldly. "I can imagine your feelings on finding your uncle's home in the possession of your enemies, and your presence under the family roof only a sufferance. I can hardly believe it a pleasure to you, or a task you would have accepted for yourself alone."

"But," she said, turning towards him wickedly, "what if I did it only to excite my revenge; what if I knew it would give me courage to incite my people to carry war into your own homes; to make you of the North feel as I feel, and taste our bitterness?"

"I could easily understand that, too," he returned, with listless coldness, "although I don't admit that revenge is an unmixed pleasure, even to a woman."

"A woman!" she repeated indignantly. "There is no sex in a war like this."

"You are spoiling your flower," he said quietly. "It is very pretty, and a native one, too; not an invader, or even transplanted. May I look at it?"

She hesitated, half recoiling for an instant, and her hand trembled. Then, suddenly and abruptly she said, with a hysteric little laugh, "Take it, then," and almost thrust it in his hand.

It certainly was a pretty flower, not unlike a lily in appearance, with a bell-like cup and long anthers covered with a fine pollen, like red dust. As he lifted it to his face, to inhale its perfume, she uttered a slight cry, and snatched it from his hand.

"There!" she said, with the same nervous laugh. "I knew you would; I ought to have warned you. The pollen comes off so easily, and leaves a stain. And you 've got some on your cheek. Look!" she continued, taking her handkerchief from her pocket and wiping his cheek; "see there!" The delicate cambric showed a blood-red streak.

"It grows in a swamp," she continued, in the same excited strain; "we call it dragon's teeth, — like the kind that was sown in the story, you know. We children used to find it, and then paint our faces and lips with it. We called it our rouge. I was almost tempted to try it again when I found it just now. It took me back so to the old times."

Following her odd manner rather than her words, as she turned her face towards him suddenly, Brant was inclined to think that she had tried it already, so scarlet was

her cheek. But it presently paled again under his cold scrutiny.

"You must miss the old times," he said calmly. "I am afraid you found very little of them left, except in these flowers."

"And hardly these," she said bitterly. "Your troops had found a way through the marsh, and had trampled down the bushes."

Brant's brow clouded. He remembered that the brook, which had run red during the fight, had lost itself in this marsh. It did not increase his liking for this beautiful but blindly vicious animal at his side, and even his momentary pity for her was fading fast. She was incorrigible. They walked on for a few moments in silence.

"You said," she began at last, in a gentler and even hesitating voice, "that your wife was a Southern woman."

He checked an irritated start with difficulty.

"I believe I did," he said coldly, as if he regretted it.

"And of course you taught her *your* gospel, — the gospel according to St. Lincoln. Oh, I know," she went on hurriedly, as if conscious of his irritation and seeking to allay it. "She was a woman and loved you,

and thought with your thoughts and saw only with your eyes. Yes, that 's the way with us, — I suppose we all do it!" she added bitterly.

"She had her own opinions," said Brant briefly, as he recovered himself.

Nevertheless, his manner so decidedly closed all further discussion that there was nothing left for the young girl but silence. But it was broken by her in a few moments in her old contemptuous voice and manner.

"Pray don't trouble yourself to accompany me any further, General Brant. Unless, of course, you are afraid I may come across some of your — your soldiers. I promise you I won't eat them."

"I am afraid you must suffer my company a little longer, Miss Faulkner, on account of those same soldiers," returned Brant gravely. "You may not know that this road, in which I find you, takes you through a cordon of pickets. If you were alone you would be stopped, questioned, and, failing to give the password, you would be detained, sent to the guard-house, and" — he stopped, and fixed his eyes on her keenly as he added, "and searched."

"You would not dare to search a wo-

man!" she said indignantly, although her flush gave way to a slight pallor.

"You said just now that there should be no sex in a war like this," returned Brant carelessly, but without abating his scrutinizing gaze.

"Then it *is* war?" she said quickly, with a white, significant face.

His look of scrutiny turned to one of puzzled wonder. But at the same moment there was the flash of a bayonet in the hedge, a voice called "Halt!" and a soldier stepped into the road.

General Brant advanced, met the salute of the picket with a few formal words, and then turned towards his fair companion, as another soldier and a sergeant joined the group.

"Miss Faulkner is new to the camp, took the wrong turning, and was unwittingly leaving the lines when I joined her." He fixed his eyes intently on her now colorless face, but she did not return his look. "You will show her the shortest way to quarters," he continued, to the sergeant, "and should she at any time again lose her way, you will again conduct her home, — but without detaining or reporting her."

He lifted his cap, remounted his horse, and rode away, as the young girl, with a proud, indifferent step, moved down the road with the sergeant. A mounted officer passed him and saluted, — it was one of his own staff. From some strange instinct, he knew that he had witnessed the scene, and from some equally strange intuition he was annoyed by it. But he continued his way, visiting one or two outposts, and returned by a long detour to his quarters. As he stepped upon the veranda he saw Miss Faulkner at the bottom of the garden talking with some one across the hedge. By the aid of his glass he could recognize the shapely figure of the mulatto woman which he had seen before. But by its aid he also discovered that she was carrying a flower exactly like the one which Miss Faulkner still held in her hand. Had she been with Miss Faulkner in the lane, and if so, why had she disappeared when he came up? Impelled by something stronger than mere curiosity, he walked quickly down the garden, but she evidently had noticed him, for she as quickly disappeared. Not caring to meet Miss Faulkner again, he retraced his steps, resolving that he would, on the first

opportunity, personally examine and interrogate this new visitor. For if she were to take Miss Faulkner's place in a subordinate capacity, this precaution was clearly within his rights.

He reëntered his room and seated himself at his desk before the dispatches, orders, and reports awaiting him. He found himself, however, working half mechanically, and recurring to his late interview with Miss Faulkner in the lane. If she had any inclination to act the spy, or to use her position here as a means of communicating with the enemy's lines, he thought he had thoroughly frightened her. Nevertheless, now, for the first time, he was inclined to accept his chief's opinion of her. She was not only too clumsy and inexperienced, but she totally lacked the self-restraint of a spy. Her nervous agitation in the lane was due to something more disturbing than his mere possible intrusion upon her confidences with the mulatto. The significance of her question, "Then it *is* war?" was at best a threat, and that implied hesitation. He recalled her strange allusion to his wife; was it merely the outcome of his own foolish confession on their first interview, or was it

a concealed ironical taunt? Being satisfied, however, that she was not likely to imperil his public duty in any way, he was angry with himself for speculating further. But, although he still felt towards her the same antagonism she had at first provoked, he was conscious that she was beginning to exercise a strange fascination over him.

Dismissing her at last with an effort, he finished his work and then rose, and unlocking a closet, took out a small dispatch-box, to which he intended to intrust a few more important orders and memoranda. As he opened it with a key on his watch-chain, he was struck with a faint perfume that seemed to come from it, — a perfume that he remembered. Was it the smell of the flower that Miss Faulkner carried, or the scent of the handkerchief with which she had wiped his cheek, or a mingling of both? Or was he under some spell to think of that wretched girl, and her witch-like flower? He leaned over the box and suddenly started. Upon the outer covering of a dispatch was a singular blood-red streak! He examined it closely, — it was the powdery stain of the lily pollen, — exactly as he had seen it on her handkerchief.

There could be no mistake. He passed his finger over the stain; he could still feel the slippery, infinitesimal powder of the pollen. It was not there when he had closed the box that morning; it was impossible that it should be there unless the box had been opened in his absence. He reëxamined the contents of the box; the papers were all there. More than that, they were papers of no importance except to him personally; contained no plans nor key to any military secret; he had been far too wise to intrust any to the accidents of this alien house. The prying intruder, whoever it was, had gained nothing! But there was unmistakably the attempt! And the existence of a would-be spy within the purlieus of the house was equally clear.

He called an officer from the next room.

"Has any one been here since my absence?"

"No, General."

"Has any one passed through the hall?"

He had fully anticipated the answer, as the subaltern replied, "Only the women servants."

He reëntered the room. Closing the door, he again carefully examined the box, his

table, the papers upon it, the chair before it, and even the Chinese matting on the floor, for any further indication of the pollen. It hardly seemed possible that any one could have entered the room with the flower in their hand without scattering some of the tell-tale dust elsewhere; it was too large a flower to be worn on the breast or in the hair. Again, no one would have dared to linger there long enough to have made an examination of the box, with an officer in the next room, and the sergeant passing. The box had been removed, and the examination made elsewhere!

An idea seized him. Miss Faulkner was still absent, the mulatto had apparently gone home. He quickly mounted the staircase, but instead of entering his room, turned suddenly aside into the wing which had been reserved. The first door yielded as he turned its knob gently and entered a room which he at once recognized as the "young lady's boudoir." But the dusty and draped furniture had been rearranged and uncovered, and the apartment bore every sign of present use. Yet, although there was unmistakable evidence of its being used by a person of taste and refinement, he

was surprised to see that the garments hanging in an open press were such as were used by negro servants, and that a gaudy handkerchief such as housemaids used for turbans was lying on the pretty silk coverlet. He did not linger over these details, but cast a rapid glance round the room. Then his eyes became fixed on a fanciful writing-desk, which stood by the window. For, in a handsome vase placed on its level top, and drooping on a portfolio below, hung a cluster of the very flowers that Miss Faulkner had carried!

CHAPTER IV.

It seemed plain to Brant that the dispatch-box had been conveyed here and opened for security on this desk, and in the hurry of examining the papers the flower had been jostled and the fallen grains of pollen overlooked by the spy. There were one or two freckles of red on the desk, which made this accident appear the more probable. But he was equally struck by another circumstance. The desk stood immediately before the window. As he glanced mechanically from it, he was surprised to see that it commanded an extensive view of the slope below the eminence on which the house stood, even beyond his furthest line of pickets. The vase of flowers, each of which was nearly as large as a magnolia blossom, and striking in color, occupied a central position before it, and no doubt could be quite distinctly seen from a distance. From this circumstance he could not resist the strong impression that this fateful and ex-

traordinary blossom, carried by Miss Faulkner and the mulatto, and so strikingly "in evidence" at the window, was in some way a signal. Obeying an impulse which he was conscious had a half superstitious foundation, he carefully lifted the vase from its position before the window, and placed it on a side table. Then he cautiously slipped from the room.

But he could not easily shake off the perplexity which the occurrence had caused, although he was satisfied that it was fraught with no military or strategic danger to his command, and that the unknown spy had obtained no information whatever. Yet he was forced to admit to himself that he was more concerned in his attempts to justify the conduct of Miss Faulkner with this later revelation. It was quite possible that the dispatch-box had been purloined by some one else during her absence from the house, as the presence of the mulatto servant in his room would have been less suspicious than hers. There was really little evidence to connect Miss Faulkner with the actual outrage, — rather might not the real spy have taken advantage of her visit here, to throw suspicion upon her? He remembered her

singular manner, — the strange inconsistency with which she had forced this flower upon him. She would hardly have done so had she been conscious of its having so serious an import. Yet, what was the secret of her manifest agitation? A sudden inspiration flashed across his mind; a smile came upon his lips. She was in love! The enemy's line contained some sighing Strephon of a young subaltern with whom she was in communication, and for whom she had undertaken this quest. The flower was their language of correspondence, no doubt. It explained also the young girl's animosity against the younger officers, — his adversaries; against himself, — their commander. He had previously wondered why, if she were indeed a spy, she had not chosen, upon some equally specious order from Washington, the headquarters of the division commander, whose secrets were more valuable. This was explained by the fact that she was nearer the lines and her lover in her present abode. He had no idea that he was making excuses for her, — he believed himself only just. The recollection of what she had said of the power of love, albeit it had hurt him cruelly at the time, was now clearer to him,

and even seemed to mitigate her offense. She would be here but a day or two longer; he could afford to wait without interrogating her.

But as to the real intruder, spy or thief, — that was another affair, and quickly settled. He gave an order to the officer of the day peremptorily forbidding the entrance of alien servants or slaves within the precincts of the headquarters. Any one thus trespassing was to be brought before him. The officer looked surprised, he even fancied disappointed. The graces of the mulatto woman's figure had evidently not been thrown away upon his subalterns.

An hour or two later, when he was mounting his horse for a round of inspection, he was surprised to see Miss Faulkner, accompanied by the mulatto woman, running hurriedly to the house. He had forgotten his late order until he saw the latter halted by the sentries, but the young girl came flying on, regardless of her companion. Her skirt was held in one hand, her straw hat had fallen back in her flight, and was caught only by a ribbon around her swelling throat, and her loosened hair lay in a black rippled loop on one shoulder. For an instant Brant

thought that she was seeking him in indignation at his order, but a second look at her set face, eager eyes, and parted scarlet lips, showed him that she had not even noticed him in the concentration of her purpose. She swept by him into the hall, he heard the swish of her skirt and rapid feet on the stairs, — she was gone. What had happened, or was this another of her moods?

But he was called to himself by the apparition of a corporal standing before him, with the mulatto woman, — the first capture under his order. She was tall, well-formed, but unmistakably showing the negro type, even in her small features. Her black eyes were excited, but unintelligent; her manner dogged, but with the obstinacy of half-conscious stupidity. Brant felt not only disappointed, but had a singular impression that she was not the same woman that he had first seen. Yet there was the tall, graceful figure, the dark profile, and the turbaned head that he had once followed down the passage by his room.

Her story was as stupidly simple. She had known "Missy" from a chile! She had just traipsed over to see her that afternoon; they were walking together when the sojers

stopped her. She had never been stopped before, even by "the patter rollers."[1] Her old massa (Manly) had gib leaf to go see Miss Tilly, and had n't said nuffin about no "orders."

More annoyed than he cared to confess, Brant briefly dismissed her with a warning. As he cantered down the slope the view of the distant pickets recalled the window in the wing, and he turned in his saddle to look at it. There it was — the largest and most dominant window in that part of the building — and within it, a distinct and vivid object almost filling the opening, was the vase of flowers, which he had a few hours ago removed, *restored to its original position!* He smiled. The hurried entrance and consternation of Miss Faulkner were now fully explained. He had interrupted some impassioned message, perhaps even countermanded some affectionate rendezvous beyond the lines. And it seemed to settle the fact that it was she who had done the signaling! But would not this also make her cognizant of the taking of the dispatch-box? He reflected, however, that the room

[1] *i. e.*, patrols, — a civic home-guard in the South that kept surveillance of slaves.

was apparently occupied by the mulatto woman — he remembered the calico dresses and turban on the bed — and it was possible that Miss Faulkner had only visited it for the purpose of signaling to her lover. Although this circumstance did not tend to make his mind easier, it was, however, presently diverted by a new arrival and a strange recognition.

As he rode through the camp a group of officers congregated before a large mess tent appeared to be highly amused by the conversation — half monologue and half harangue — of a singular-looking individual who stood in the centre. He wore a "slouch" hat, to the band of which he had imparted a military air by the addition of a gold cord, but the brim was caught up at the side in a peculiarly theatrical and highly artificial fashion. A heavy cavalry sabre depended from a broad-buckled belt under his black frock coat, with the addition of two revolvers — minus their holsters — stuck on either side of the buckle, after the style of a stage smuggler. A pair of long enameled leather riding boots, with the tops turned deeply over, as if they had once done duty for the representative of a cavalier,

completed his extraordinary equipment. The group were so absorbed in him that they did not perceive the approach of their chief and his orderly; and Brant, with a sign to the latter, halted only a few paces from this central figure. His speech was a singular mingling of high-flown and exalted epithets, with inexact pronunciation and occasional lapses of Western slang.

"Well, I ain't purtendin' to any stratutegical smartness, and I did n't gradooate at West Point as one of those Apocryphal Engineers; I don't do much talking about 'flank' movements or 'recognizances in force' or 'Ekellon skirmishing,' but when it comes down to square Ingin fightin', I reckon I kin have my say. There are men who don't know the Army Contractor," he added darkly, "who mebbe have heard of 'Red Jim.' I don't mention names, gentlemen, but only the other day a man that you all know says to me, 'If I only knew what you do about scoutin' I would n't be wanting for information as I do.' I ain't goin' to say who it was, or break any confidences between gentlemen by saying how many stars he had on his shoulder strap; but he was a man who knew what he was say-

ing. And I say agin, gentlemen, that the curse of the Northern Army is the want of proper scoutin'. What was it caused Bull's Run? — Want o' scoutin'. What was it rolled up Pope? — Want o' scoutin'. What caused the slaughter at the Wilderness? — Want o' scoutin' — Ingin scoutin'! Why, only the other day, gentlemen, I was approached to know what I 'd take to organize a scoutin' force. And what did I say? — 'No, General; it ain't because I represent one of the largest Army Beef Contracts in this country,' says I. 'It ain't because I belong, so to speak, to the "Sinews of War;" but because I 'd want about ten thousand trained Ingins from the Reservations!' And the regular West Point, high-toned, scientific inkybus that weighs so heavily on our army don't see it — and won't have it! Then Sherman, he sez to me" —

But here a roar of laughter interrupted him, and in the cross fire of sarcastic interrogations that began Brant saw, with relief, a chance of escape. For in the voice, manner, and, above all, the characteristic temperament of the stranger, he had recognized his old playmate and the husband of Susy, — the redoubtable Jim Hooker! There was

no mistaking that gloomy audacity; that mysterious significance; that magnificent lying. But even at that moment Clarence Brant's heart had gone out, with all his old loyalty of feeling, towards his old companion. He knew that a public recognition of him then and there would plunge Hooker into confusion; he felt keenly the ironical plaudits and laughter of his officers over the manifest weakness and vanity of the ex-teamster, ex-rancher, ex-actor, and husband of his old girl sweetheart, and would have spared him the knowledge that he had overheard it. Turning hastily to the orderly, he bade him bring the stranger to his headquarters, and rode away unperceived.

He had heard enough, however, to account for his presence there, and the singular chance that had brought them again together. He was evidently one of those large civil contractors of supplies whom the Government was obliged to employ, who visited the camp half officially, and whom the army alternately depended upon and abused. Brant had dealt with his underlings in the Commissariat, and even now remembered that he had heard he was coming, but had overlooked the significance of his name.

But how he came to leave his theatrical profession, how he had attained a position which implied a command of considerable capital — for many of the contractors had already amassed large fortunes — and what had become of Susy and her ambitions in this radical change of circumstances, were things still to be learned. In his own changed conditions he had seldom thought of her; it was with a strange feeling of irritation and half responsibility that he now recalled their last interview and the emotion to which he had yielded.

He had not long to wait. He had scarcely regained the quarters at his own private office before he heard the step of the orderly upon the veranda and the trailing clank of Hooker's sabre. He did not know, however, that Hooker, without recognizing his name, had received the message as a personal tribute, and had left his sarcastic companions triumphantly, with the air of going to a confidential interview, to which his well-known military criticism had entitled him. It was with a bearing of gloomy importance and his characteristic, sullen, sidelong glance that he entered the apartment and did not look up until Brant had

signaled the orderly to withdraw, and closed the door behind him. And then he recognized his old boyish companion — the preferred favorite of fortune!

For a moment he gasped with astonishment. For a moment gloomy incredulity, suspicion, delight, pride, admiration, even affection, struggled for mastery in his sullen, staring eyes and open, twitching mouth. For here was Clarence Brant, handsomer than ever, more superior than ever, in the majesty of uniform and authority which fitted him — the younger man — by reason of his four years of active service, with the careless ease and bearing of the veteran! Here was the hero whose name was already so famous that the mere coincidence of it with that of the modest civilian he had known would have struck him as preposterous. Yet here he was — supreme and dazzling — surrounded by the pomp and circumstance of war — into whose reserved presence he, Jim Hooker, had been ushered with the formality of challenge, saluting, and presented bayonets!

Luckily, Brant had taken advantage of his first gratified ejaculation to shake him warmly by the hand, and then, with both

hands laid familiarly on his shoulder, force him down into a chair. Luckily, for by that time Jim Hooker had, with characteristic gloominess, found time to taste the pangs of envy — an envy the more keen since, in spite of his success as a peaceful contractor, he had always secretly longed for military display and distinction. He looked at the man who had achieved it, as he firmly believed, by sheer luck and accident, and his eyes darkened. Then, with characteristic weakness and vanity, he began to resist his first impressions of Clarence's superiority, and to air his own importance. He leaned heavily back in the chair in which he had been thus genially forced, drew off his gauntlet and attempted to thrust it through his belt, as he had seen Brant do, but failed on account of his pistols already occupying that position, dropped it, got his sword between his legs in attempting to pick it up, and then leaned back again, with half-closed eyes serenely indifferent of his old companion's smiling face.

"I reckon," he began slowly, with a slightly patronizing air, "that we 'd have met, sooner or later, at Washington, or at Grant's headquarters, for Hooker, Meacham

& Co. go everywhere, and are about as well known as major-generals, to say nothin'," he went on, with a sidelong glance at Brant's shoulder-straps, "of brigadiers; and it 's rather strange — only, of course, you 're kind of fresh in the service — that you ain't heard of me afore."

"But I 'm very glad to hear of you now, Jim," said Brant, smiling, "and from your own lips — which I am also delighted to find," he added mischievously, "are still as frankly communicative on that topic as of old. But I congratulate you, old fellow, on your good fortune. When did you leave the stage?"

Mr. Hooker frowned slightly.

"I never was really on the stage, you know," he said, waving his hand with assumed negligence. "Only went on to please my wife. Mrs. Hooker would n't act with vulgar professionals, don't you see! I was really manager most of the time, and lessee of the theatre. Went East when the war broke out, to offer my sword and knowledge of Ingin fightin' to Uncle Sam! Drifted into a big pork contract at St. Louis, with Fremont. Been at it ever since. Offered a commission in the reg'lar service lots o' times. Refused."

"Why?" asked Brant demurely.

"Too much West Point starch around to suit *me*," returned Hooker darkly. "And too many spies!"

"Spies?" echoed Brant abstractedly, with a momentary reminiscence of Miss Faulkner.

"Yes, spies," continued Hooker, with dogged mystery. "One half of Washington is watching t' other half, and, from the President's wife down, most of the women are secesh!"

Brant suddenly fixed his keen eyes on his guest. But the next moment he reflected that this was only Jim Hooker's usual speech, and possessed no ulterior significance. He smiled again, and said, more gently, —

"And how is Mrs. Hooker?"

Mr. Hooker fixed his eyes on the ceiling, rose, and pretended to look out of the window; then, taking his seat again by the table, as if fronting an imaginary audience, and pulling slowly at his gauntlets after the usual theatrical indication of perfect *sang-froid*, said, —

"There ain't any!"

"Good heavens!" said Brant, with gen-

uine emotion. "I beg your pardon. Really, I" —

"Mrs. Hooker and me are divorced," continued Hooker, slightly changing his attitude, and leaning heavily on his sabre, with his eyes still on his fanciful audience. "There was, you understand" — lightly tossing his gauntlet aside — "incompatibility of temper — and —we — parted! Ha!"

He uttered a low, bitter, scornful laugh, which, however, produced the distinct impression in Brant's mind that up to that moment he had never had the slightest feeling in the matter whatever.

"You seemed to be on such good terms with each other!" murmured Brant vaguely.

"Seemed!" said Hooker bitterly, glancing sardonically at an ideal second row in the pit before him, "yes — seemed! There were other differences, social and political. You understand that; you have suffered, too." He reached out his hand and pressed Brant's, in heavy effusiveness. "But," he continued haughtily, lightly tossing his glove again, "we are also men of the world; we let that pass."

And it was possible that he found the strain of his present attitude too great, for he changed to an easier position.

"But," said Brant curiously, "I always thought that Mrs. Hooker was intensely Union and Northern?"

"Put on!" said Hooker, in his natural voice.

"But you remember the incident of the flag?" persisted Brant.

"Mrs. Hooker was always an actress," said Hooker significantly. "But," he added cheerfully, "Mrs. Hooker is now the wife of Senator Boompointer, one of the wealthiest and most powerful Republicans in Washington — carries the patronage of the whole West in his vest pocket."

"Yet, if she is not a Republican, why did she" — began Brant.

" For a purpose," replied Hooker darkly. "But," he added again, with greater cheerfulness, " she belongs to the very *élite* of Washington society. Goes to all the foreign ambassadors' balls, and is a power at the White House. Her picture is in all the first-class illustrated papers."

The singular but unmistakable pride of the man in the importance of the wife from whom he was divorced, and for whom he did not care, would have offended Brant's delicacy, or at least have excited his ridicule,

but for the reason that he was more deeply stung by Hooker's allusion to his own wife and his degrading similitude of their two conditions. But he dismissed the former as part of Hooker's invincible and still boyish extravagance, and the latter as part of his equally characteristic assumption. Perhaps he was conscious, too, notwithstanding the lapse of years and the condonation of separation and forgetfulness, that he deserved little delicacy from the hands of Susy's husband. Nevertheless, he dreaded to hear him speak again of her; and the fear was realized in a question.

"Does she know you are here?"

"Who?" said Brant curtly.

"Your wife. That is — I reckon she 's your wife still, eh?"

"Yes; but I do not know what she knows," returned Brant quietly. He had regained his self-composure.

"Susy, — Mrs. Senator Boompointer, that is," — said Hooker, with an apparent dignity in his late wife's new title, "allowed that she 'd gone abroad on a secret mission from the Southern Confederacy to them crowned heads over there. She was good at ropin' men in, you know. Anyhow, Susy,

afore she was Mrs. Boompointer, was dead set on findin' out where she was, but never could. She seemed to drop out of sight a year ago. Some said one thing, and some said another. But you can bet your bottom dollar that Mrs. Senator Boompointer, who knows how to pull all the wires in Washington, will know, if any one does."

"But is Mrs. Boompointer really disaffected, and a Southern sympathizer?" said Brant, "or is it only caprice or fashion?"

While speaking he had risen, with a half-abstracted face, and had gone to the window, where he stood in a listening attitude. Presently he opened the window, and stepped outside. Hooker wonderingly followed him. One or two officers had already stepped out of their rooms, and were standing upon the veranda; another had halted in the path. Then one quickly reëntered the house, reappeared with his cap and sword in his hand, and ran lightly toward the guard-house. A slight crackling noise seemed to come from beyond the garden wall.

"What 's up?" said Hooker, with staring eyes.

"Picket firing!"

The crackling suddenly became a long rattle. Brant reëntered the room, and picked up his hat.

"You 'll excuse me for a few moments."

A faint sound, soft yet full, and not unlike a bursting bubble, made the house appear to leap elastically, like the rebound of a rubber ball.

"What 's that?" gasped Hooker.

"Cannon, out of range!"

CHAPTER V.

In another instant bugles were ringing through the camp, with the hurrying hoofs of mounted officers and the trampling of forming men. The house itself was almost deserted. Although the single cannon-shot had been enough to show that it was no mere skirmishing of pickets, Brant still did not believe in any serious attack of the enemy. His position, as in the previous engagement, had no strategic importance to them; they were no doubt only making a feint against it to conceal some advance upon the centre of the army two miles away. Satisfied that he was in easy supporting distance of his division commander, he extended his line along the ridge, ready to fall back in that direction, while retarding their advance and masking the position of his own chief. He gave a few orders necessary to the probable abandonment of the house, and then returned to it. Shot and shell were already dropping in the field below. A

thin ridge of blue haze showed the line of skirmish fire. A small conical, white cloud, like a bursting cotton-pod, revealed an open battery in the willow-fringed meadow. Yet the pastoral peacefulness of the house was unchanged. The afternoon sun lay softly on its deep verandas; the *pot pourri* incense of fallen rose-leaves haunted it still.

He entered his room through the French window on the veranda, when the door leading from the passage was suddenly flung open, and Miss Faulkner swept quickly inside, closed the door behind her, and leaned back against it, panting and breathless.

Clarence was startled, and for a moment ashamed. He had suddenly realized that in the excitement he had entirely forgotten her and the dangers to which she might be exposed. She had probably heard the firing, her womanly fears had been awakened; she had come to him for protection. But as he turned towards her with a reassuring smile, he was shocked to see that her agitation and pallor were far beyond any physical cause. She motioned him desperately to shut the window by which he had entered, and said, with white lips, —

"I must speak with you alone!"

"Certainly. But there is no immediate danger to you even here — and I can soon put you beyond the reach of any possible harm."

"Harm — to me! God! if it were only that!"

He stared at her uneasily.

"Listen," she said gaspingly, "listen to me! Then hate, despise me — kill me if you will. For you are betrayed and ruined — cut off and surrounded! It has been helped on by me, but I swear to you the blow did not come from *my* hand. I would have saved you. God only knows how it happened — it was Fate!"

In an instant Brant saw the whole truth instinctively and clearly. But with the revelation came the usual calmness and perfect self-possession which never yet had failed him in any emergency. With the sound of the increasing cannonade and its shifting position made clearer to his ears, the view of his whole threatened position spread out like a map before his eyes, the swift calculation of the time his men could hold the ridge in his mind — even a hurried estimate of the precious moments he could give to the wretched woman before him — he

even then, gravely and gently, led her to a chair and said in a calm voice, —

"That is not enough! Speak slowly, plainly. I must know everything. How and in what way have you betrayed me?"

She looked at him imploringly — reassured, yet awed by his gentleness.

"You won't believe me; you cannot believe me! for I do not even know. I have taken and exchanged letters — whose contents I never saw — between the Confederates and a spy who comes to this house, but who is far away by this time. I did it because I thought you hated and despised me — because I thought it was my duty to help my cause — because you said it was 'war' between us — but I never spied on you. I swear it."

"Then how do you know of this attack?" he said calmly.

She brightened, half timidly, half hopefully.

"There is a window in the wing of this house that overlooks the slope near the Confederate lines. There was a signal placed in it — not by me — but I know it meant that as long as it was there the plot, whatever it was, was not ripe, and that no attack

would be made on you as long as it was visible. That much I know, — that much the spy had to tell me, for we both had to guard that room in turns. I wanted to keep this dreadful thing off — until" — her voice trembled, "until," she added hurriedly, seeing his calm eyes were reading her very soul, "until I went away — and for that purpose I withheld some of the letters that were given me. But this morning, while I was away from the house, I looked back and saw that the signal was no longer there. Some one had changed it. I ran back, but I was too late — God help me! — as you see."

The truth flashed upon Brant. It was his own hand that had precipitated the attack. But a larger truth came to him now, like a dazzling inspiration. If he had thus precipitated the attack before they were ready, there was a chance that it was imperfect, and there was still hope. But there was no trace of this visible in his face as he fixed his eyes calmly on hers, although his pulses were halting in expectancy as he said —

"Then the spy had suspected you, and changed it."

"Oh, no," she said eagerly, "for the spy was with me and was frightened too. We both ran back together — you remember — she was stopped by the patrol!"

She checked herself suddenly, but too late. Her cheeks blazed, her head sank, with the foolish identification of the spy into which her eagerness had betrayed her.

But Brant appeared not to notice it. He was, in fact, puzzling his brain to conceive what information the stupid mulatto woman could have obtained here. His strength, his position was no secret to the enemy — there was nothing to gain from him. She must have been, like the trembling, eager woman before him, a mere tool of others.

"Did this woman live here?" he said.

"No," she said. "She lived with the Manlys, but had friends whom she visited at your general's headquarters."

With difficulty Brant suppressed a start. It was clear to him now. The information had been obtained at the division headquarters, and passed through his camp as being nearest the Confederate lines. But what was the information — and what movement had he precipitated? It was clear that this woman did not know. He looked at

her keenly. A sudden explosion shook the house, — a drift of smoke passed the window, — a shell had burst in the garden.

She had been gazing at him despairingly, wistfully — but did not blanch or start.

An idea took possession of him. He approached her, and took her cold hand. A half-smile parted her pale lips.

"You have courage — you have devotion," he said gravely. "I believe you regret the step you have taken. If you could undo what you have done, even at peril to yourself, dare you do it?"

"Yes," she said breathlessly.

"You are known to the enemy. If I am surrounded, you could pass through their lines unquestioned?"

"Yes," she said eagerly.

"A note from me would pass you again through the pickets of our headquarters. But you would bear a note to the general that no eyes but his must see. It would not implicate you or yours; would only be a word of warning."

"And you," she said quickly, "would be saved! They would come to your assistance! You would not then be taken?"

He smiled gently.

"Perhaps — who knows!"

He sat down and wrote hurriedly.

"This," he said, handing her a slip of paper, "is a pass. You will use it beyond your own lines. This note," he continued, handing her a sealed envelope, "is for the general. No one else must see it or know of it — not even your lover, should you meet him!"

"My lover!" she said indignantly, with a flash of her old savagery; "what do you mean? I have no lover!"

Brant glanced at her flushed face.

"I thought," he said quietly, "that there was some one you cared for in yonder lines — some one you wrote to. It would have been an excuse" —

He stopped, as her face paled again, and her hands dropped heavily at her side.

"Good God! — you thought that, too! You thought that I would sacrifice you for another man!"

"Pardon me," said Brant quickly. "I was foolish. But whether your lover is a man or a cause, you have shown a woman's devotion. And, in repairing your fault, you are showing more than a woman's courage now."

To his surprise, the color had again mounted her pretty cheeks, and even a flash of mischief shone in her blue eyes.

"It would have been an excuse," she murmured, "yes — to save a man, surely!" Then she said quickly, "I will go. At once! I am ready!"

"One moment," he said gravely. "Although this pass and an escort insure your probable safe conduct, this is 'war' and danger! You are still a spy! Are you ready to go?"

"I am," she said proudly, tossing back a braid of her fallen hair. Yet a moment after she hesitated. Then she said, in a lower voice, "Are you ready to forgive?"

"In either case," he said, touched by her manner; "and God speed you!"

He extended his hand, and left a slight pressure on her cold fingers. But they slipped quickly from his grasp, and she turned away with a heightened color.

He stepped to the door. One or two aides-de-camp, withheld by his order against intrusion, were waiting eagerly with reports. The horse of a mounted field officer was pawing the garden turf. The officers stared at the young girl.

"Take Miss Faulkner, with a flag, to some safe point of the enemy's line. She is a non-combatant of their own, and will receive their protection."

He had scarcely exchanged a dozen words with the aids-de-camp before the field officer hurriedly entered. Taking Brant aside, he said quickly, —

"Pardon me, General; but there is a strong feeling among the men that this attack is the result of some information obtained by the enemy. You must know that the woman you have just given a safeguard to is suspected, and the men are indignant."

"The more reason why she should be conveyed beyond any consequences of their folly, Major," said Brant frigidly, "and I look to you for her safe convoy. There is nothing in this attack to show that the enemy has received any information regarding us. But I would suggest that it would be better to see that my orders are carried out regarding the slaves and non-combatants who are passing our lines from divisional headquarters, where valuable information may be obtained, than in the surveillance of a testy and outspoken girl."

An angry flush crossed the major's cheek

as he saluted and fell back, and Brant turned to the aide-de-camp. The news was grave. The column of the enemy was moving against the ridge — it was no longer possible to hold it — and the brigade was cut off from its communication with the divisional headquarters, although as yet no combined movement was made against it. Brant's secret fears that it was an intended impact against the centre were confirmed. Would his communication to the divisional commander pass through the attacking column in time?

Yet one thing puzzled him. The enemy, after forcing his flank, had shown no disposition, even with their overwhelming force, to turn aside and crush him. He could easily have fallen back, when it was possible to hold the ridge no longer, without pursuit. His other flank and rear were not threatened, as they might have been, by the division of so large an attacking column, which was moving steadily on towards the ridge. It was this fact that seemed to show a failure or imperfection in the enemy's plan. It was possible that his precipitation of the attack by the changed signal had been the cause of it. Doubtless some provision had

been made to attack him in flank and rear, but in the unexpected hurry of the onset it had to be abandoned. He could still save himself, as his officers knew; but his conviction that he might yet be able to support his divisional commander by holding his position doggedly, but coolly awaiting his opportunity, was strong. More than that, it was his temperament and instinct.

Harrying them in flank and rear, contesting the ground inch by inch, and holding his own against the artillery sent to dislodge him, or the outriding cavalry that, circling round, swept through his open ranks, he saw his files melt away beside this steady current without flinching.

CHAPTER VI.

YET all along the fateful ridge — now obscured and confused with thin crossing smoke-drifts from file-firing, like partly rubbed-out slate-pencil marks; or else, when cleared of those drifts, presenting only an indistinguishable map of zigzag lines of straggling wagons and horses, unintelligible to any eye but his — the singular magnetism of the chief was felt everywhere: whether it was shown in the quick closing in of resistance to some sharper onset of the enemy or the more dogged stand of inaction under fire, his power was always dominant. A word or two of comprehensive direction sent through an aide-de-camp, or the sudden relief of his dark, watchful, composed face uplifted above a line of bayonets, never failed in their magic. Like all born leaders, he seemed in these emergencies to hold a charmed life — infecting his followers with a like disbelief in death; men dropped to right and left of him with serene assurance

in their ghastly faces or a cry of life and confidence in their last gasp. Stragglers fell in and closed up under his passing glance; a hopeless, inextricable wrangle around an overturned caisson, at a turn of the road, resolved itself into an orderly, quiet, deliberate clearing away of the impediment before the significant waiting of that dark, silent horseman.

Yet under this imperturbable mask he was keenly conscious of everything; in that apparent concentration there was a sharpening of all his senses and his impressibility: he saw the first trace of doubt or alarm in the face of a subaltern to whom he was giving an order; the first touch of sluggishness in a re-forming line; the more significant clumsiness of a living evolution that he knew was clogged by the dead bodies of comrades; the ominous silence of a breastwork; the awful inertia of some rigidly kneeling files beyond, which still kept their form but never would move again; the melting away of skirmish points; the sudden gaps here and there; the sickening incurving of what a moment before had been a straight line — all these he saw in all their fatal significance. But even at this moment, coming

upon a hasty barricade of overset commissary wagons, he stopped to glance at a familiar figure he had seen but an hour ago, who now seemed to be commanding a group of collected stragglers and camp followers. Mounted on a wheel, with a revolver in each hand and a bowie knife between his teeth — theatrical even in his paroxysm of undoubted courage — glared Jim Hooker. And Clarence Brant, with the whole responsibility of the field on his shoulders, even at that desperate moment, found himself recalling a vivid picture of the actor Hooker personating the character of "Red Dick" in "Rosalie, the Prairie Flower," as he had seen him in a California theatre five years before.

It wanted still an hour of the darkness that would probably close the fight of that day. Could he hold out, keeping his offensive position so long? A hasty council with his officers showed him that the weakness of their position had already infected them. They reminded him that his line of retreat was still open — that in the course of the night the enemy, although still pressing towards the division centre, might yet turn and outflank him — or that their strangely delayed supports might come up

before morning. Brant's glass, however, remained fixed on the main column, still pursuing its way along the ridge. It struck him suddenly, however, that the steady current had stopped, spread out along the crest on both sides, and was now at right angles with its previous course. There had been a check! The next moment the thunder of guns along the whole horizon, and the rising cloud of smoke, revealed a line of battle. The division centre was engaged. The opportunity he had longed for had come — the desperate chance to throw himself on their rear and cut his way through to the division — but it had come too late! He looked at his shattered ranks — scarce a regiment remained. Even as a demonstration, the attack would fail against the enemy's superior numbers. Nothing clearly was left to him now but to remain where he was — within supporting distance, and await the issue of the fight beyond. He was putting up his glass, when the dull boom of cannon in the extreme western limit of the horizon attracted his attention. By the still gleaming sky he could see a long gray line stealing up from the valley from the distant rear of the headquarters to join the main

column. They were the missing supports! His heart leaped. He held the key of the mystery now. The one imperfect detail of the enemy's plan was before him. The supports, coming later from the west, had only seen the second signal from the window — when Miss Faulkner had replaced the vase — and had avoided his position. It was impossible to limit the effect of this blunder. If the young girl who had thus saved him had reached the division commander with his message in time, he might be forewarned, and even profit by it. His own position would be less precarious, as the enemy, already engaged in front, would be unable to recover their position in the rear and correct the blunder. The bulk of their column had already streamed past him. If defeated, there was always the danger that it might be rolled back upon him — but he conjectured that the division commander would attempt to prevent the junction of the supports with the main column by breaking between them, crowding them from the ridge, and joining him. As the last stragglers of the rear guard swept by, Brant's bugles were already recalling the skirmishers. He redoubled his pickets, and resolved to wait and watch.

And there was the more painful duty of looking after the wounded and the dead. The larger rooms of the headquarters had already been used as a hospital. Passing from cot to cot, recognizing in the faces now drawn with agony, or staring in vacant unconsciousness, the features that he had seen only a few hours before flushed with enthusiasm and excitement, something of his old doubting, questioning nature returned. Was there no way but this? How far was *he* — moving among them unscathed and uninjured — responsible?

And if not he — who then? His mind went back bitterly to the old days of the conspiracy — to the inception of that struggle which was bearing such ghastly fruit. He thought of his traitorous wife, until he felt his cheeks tingle, and he was fain to avert his eyes from those of his prostrate comrades, in a strange fear that, with the clairvoyance of dying men, they should read his secret.

It was past midnight when, without undressing, he threw himself upon his bed in the little convent-like cell to snatch a few moments of sleep. Its spotless, peaceful walls and draperies affected him strangely, as if he had brought into its immaculate

serenity the sanguine stain of war. He was awakened suddenly from a deep slumber by an indefinite sense of alarm. His first thought was that he had been summoned to repel an attack. He sat up and listened; everything was silent except the measured tread of the sentry on the gravel walk below. But the door was open. He sprang to his feet and slipped into the gallery in time to see the tall figure of a woman glide before the last moonlit window at its farthest end. He could not see her face — but the characteristic turbaned head of the negro race was plainly visible.

He did not care to follow her or even to alarm the guard. If it were the spy or one of her emissaries, she was powerless now to do any harm, and under his late orders and the rigorous vigilance of his sentinels she could not leave the lines — or, indeed, the house. She probably knew this as well as he did; it was, therefore, no doubt only an accidental intrusion of one of the servants. He reëntered the room, and stood for a few moments by the window, looking over the moonlit ridge. The sounds of distant cannon had long since ceased. Wide awake, and refreshed by the keen morning air,

which alone of all created things seemed to have shaken the burden of the dreadful yesterday from its dewy wings, he turned away and lit a candle on the table. As he was rebuckling his sword belt he saw a piece of paper lying on the foot of the bed from which he had just risen. Taking it to the candle, he read in a roughly scrawled hand:

"You are asleep when you should be on the march. You have no time to lose. Before daybreak the supports of the column you have been foolishly resisting will be upon you. — From one who would save *you*, but hates your cause."

A smile of scorn passed his lips. The handwriting was unknown and evidently disguised. The purport of the message had not alarmed him; but suddenly a suspicion flashed upon him — that it came from Miss Faulkner! She had failed in her attempt to pass through the enemy's lines — or she had never tried to. She had deceived him — or had thought better of her chivalrous impulse, and now sought to mitigate her second treachery by this second warning. And he had let her messenger escape him!

He hurriedly descended the stairs. The sound of voices was approaching him. He

halted, and recognized the faces of the brigade surgeon and one of his aides-de-camp.

"We were hesitating whether to disturb you, general, but it may be an affair of some importance. Under your orders a negro woman was just now challenged stealing out of the lines. Attempting to escape, she was chased, there was a struggle and scramble over the wall, and she fell, striking her head. She was brought into the guard-house unconscious."

"Very good. I will see her," said Brant, with a feeling of relief.

"One moment, general. We thought you would perhaps prefer to see her alone," said the surgeon, "for when I endeavored to bring her to, and was sponging her face and head to discover her injuries, her color came off! She was a white woman — stained and disguised as a mulatto."

For an instant Brant's heart sank. It was Miss Faulkner.

"Did you recognize her?" he said, glancing from the one to the other. "Have you seen her here before?"

"No, sir," replied the aide-de-camp. "But she seemed to be quite a superior woman — a lady, I should say."

Brant breathed more freely.

"Where is she now?" he asked.

"In the guardhouse. We thought it better not to bring her into hospital, among the men, until we had your orders."

"You have done well," returned Brant gravely. "And you will keep this to yourselves for the present; but see that she is brought here quietly and with as little publicity as possible. Put her in my room above, which I give up to her and any necessary attendant. But you will look carefully after her, doctor," — he turned to the surgeon, — "and when she recovers consciousness let me know."

He moved away. Although attaching little importance to the mysterious message, whether sent by Miss Faulkner or emanating from the stranger herself, which, he reasoned, was based only upon a knowledge of the original plan of attack, he nevertheless quickly dispatched a small scouting party in the direction from which the attack might come, with orders to fall back and report at once. With a certain half irony of recollection he had selected Jim Hooker to accompany the party as a volunteer. This done, he returned to the gallery. The surgeon met him at the door.

"The indications of concussion are passing away," he said, "but she seems to be suffering from the exhaustion following some great nervous excitement. You may go in — she may rally from it at any moment."

With the artificial step and mysterious hush of the ordinary visitor to a sick bed, Brant entered the room. But some instinct greater than this common expression of humanity held him suddenly in awe. The room seemed no longer his — it had slipped back into that austere conventual privacy which had first impressed him. Yet he hesitated; another strange suggestion — it seemed almost a vague recollection — overcame him like some lingering perfume, far off and pathetic, in its dying familiarity. He turned his eyes almost timidly towards the bed. The coverlet was drawn up near the throat of the figure to replace the striped cotton gown stained with blood and dust, which had been hurriedly torn off and thrown on a chair. The pale face, cleansed of blood and disguising color, the long hair, still damp from the surgeon's sponge, lay rigidly back on the pillow. Suddenly this man of steady nerve uttered a faint cry, and, with a face as white as the upturned

one before him, fell on his knees beside the bed. For the face that lay there was his wife's!

Yes, hers! But the beautiful hair that she had gloried in — the hair that in his youth he had thought had once fallen like a benediction on his shoulder — was streaked with gray along the blue-veined hollows of the temples; the orbits of those clear eyes, beneath their delicately arched brows, were ringed with days of suffering; only the clear-cut profile, even to the delicate imperiousness of lips and nostril, was still there in all its beauty. The coverlet had slipped from her shoulder; its familiar cold contour startled him. He remembered how, in their early married days, he had felt the sanctity of that Diana-like revelation, and the still nymph-like austerity which clung to this strange, childless woman. He even fancied that he breathed again the subtle characteristic perfume of the laces, embroideries, and delicate enwrappings in her chamber at Robles. Perhaps it was the intensity of his gaze — perhaps it was the magnetism of his presence — but her lips parted with a half sigh, half moan. Her head, although her eyes were still closed, turned on the pillow

instinctively towards him. He rose from his knees. Her eyes opened slowly. As the first glare of wonderment cleared from them, they met him — in the old antagonism of spirit. Yet her first gesture was a pathetic feminine movement with both hands to arrange her straggling hair. It brought her white fingers, cleaned of their disguising stains, as a sudden revelation to her of what had happened; she instantly slipped them back under the coverlet again. Brant did not speak, but with folded arms stood gazing upon her. And it was her voice that first broke the silence.

"You have recognized me? Well, I suppose you know all," she said, with a weak half-defiance.

He bowed his head. He felt as yet he could not trust his voice, and envied her her own.

"I may sit up, may n't I?" She managed, by sheer force of will, to struggle to a sitting posture. Then, as the coverlet slipped from the bare shoulder, she said, as she drew it, with a shiver of disgust, around her again, —

"I forgot that you strip women, you Northern soldiers! But I forgot, too," she

added, with a sarcastic smile, "that you are also my husband, and I am in your room."

The contemptuous significance of her speech dispelled the last lingering remnant of Brant's dream. In a voice as dry as her own, he said, —

"I am afraid you will now have to remember only that I am a Northern general, and you a Southern spy."

"So be it," she said gravely. Then impulsively, "But I have not spied on *you*."

Yet, the next moment, she bit her lips as if the expression had unwittingly escaped her; and with a reckless shrug of her shoulders she lay back on her pillow.

"It matters not," said Brant coldly. "You have used this house and those within it to forward your designs. It is not your fault that you found nothing in the dispatch-box you opened."

She stared at him quickly; then shrugged her shoulders again.

"I might have known she was false to me," she said bitterly, "and that you would wheedle her soul away as you have others. Well, she betrayed me! For what?"

A flush passed over Brant's face. But with an effort he contained himself.

"It was the flower that betrayed you! The flower whose red dust fell in the box when you opened it on the desk by the window in yonder room — the flower that stood in the window as a signal — the flower I myself removed, and so spoiled the miserable plot that your friends concocted."

A look of mingled terror and awe came into her face.

"*You* changed the signal!" she repeated dazedly; then, in a lower voice, "that accounts for it all!" But the next moment she turned again fiercely upon him. "And you mean to tell me that she did n't help you — that she did n't sell me — your wife — to you for — for what was it? A look — a kiss!"

"I mean to say that she did not know the signal was changed, and that she herself restored it to its place. It is no fault of hers nor yours that I am not here a prisoner."

She passed her thin hand dazedly across her forehead.

"I see," she muttered. Then again bursting out passionately, she said — "Fool! you never would have been touched! Do you think that Lee would have gone for you, with higher game in your division com-

mander? No! Those supports were a feint to draw him to your assistance while our main column broke his centre. Yes, you may stare at me, Clarence Brant. You are a good lawyer — they say a dashing fighter, too. I never thought you a coward, even in your irresolution; but you are fighting with men drilled in the art of war and strategy when you were a boy outcast on the plains." She stopped, closed her eyes, and then added, wearily — "But that was yesterday — to-day, who knows? All may be changed. The supports may still attack you. That was why I stopped to write you that note an hour ago, when I believed I should be leaving here for ever. Yes, I did it!" she went on, with half-wearied, half-dogged determination. "You may as well know all. I had arranged to fly. Your pickets were to be drawn by friends of mine, who were waiting for me beyond your lines. Well, I lingered here when I saw you arrive — lingered to write you that note. And — I was too late!"

But Brant had been watching her varying expression, her kindling eye, her strange masculine grasp of military knowledge, her soldierly phraseology, all so new to her, that

he scarcely heeded the feminine ending of her speech. It seemed to him no longer the Diana of his youthful fancy, but some Pallas Athene, who now looked up at him from the pillow. He had never before fully believed in her unselfish devotion to the cause until now, when it seemed to have almost unsexed her. In his wildest comprehension of her he had never dreamed her a Joan of Arc, and yet hers was the face which might have confronted him, exalted and inspired, on the battlefield itself. He recalled himself with an effort.

"I thank you for your would-be warning," he said more gently, if not so tenderly, "and God knows I wish your flight had been successful. But even your warning is unnecessary, for the supports had already come up; they had followed the second signal, and diverged to engage our division on the left, leaving me alone. And their ruse of drawing our commander to assist me would not have been successful, as I had suspected it, and sent a message to him that I wanted no help."

It was the truth; it was the sole purport of the note he had sent through Miss Faulkner. He would not have disclosed his sacri-

fice; but so great was the strange domination of this woman still over him, that he felt compelled to assert his superiority. She fixed her eyes upon him.

"And Miss Faulkner took your message?" she said slowly. "Don't deny it! No one else could have passed through our lines; and you gave her a safe conduct through yours. Yes, I might have known it. And this was the creature they sent me for an ally and confidant!"

For an instant Brant felt the sting of this enforced contrast between the two women. But he only said, —

"You forget that I did not know you were the spy, nor do I believe that she suspected you were my wife."

"Why should she?" she said almost fiercely. "I am known among these people only by the name of Benham — my maiden name. Yes! — you can take me out, and shoot me under that name, without disgracing yours. Nobody will know that the Southern spy was the wife of the Northern general! You see, I have thought even of that!"

"And thinking of that," said Brant slowly, "you have put yourself — I will not

say in my power, for you are in the power of any man in this camp who may know you, or even hear you speak. Well, let us understand each other plainly. I do not know how great a sacrifice your devotion to your cause demands of you; I do know what it seems to demand of me. Hear me, then! I will do my best to protect you, and get you safely away from here; but, failing that, I tell you plainly that I shall blow out your brains and my own together."

She knew that he would do it. Yet her eyes suddenly beamed with a new and awakening light; she put back her hair again, and half raised herself upon the pillow, to gaze at his dark, set face.

"And as I shall let no other life but ours be periled in this affair," he went on quietly, "and will accompany you myself in some disguise beyond the lines, we will together take the risks — or the bullets of the sentries that may save us both all further trouble. An hour or two more will settle that. Until then your weak condition will excuse you from any disturbance or intrusion here. The mulatto woman you have sometimes personated may be still in this house; I will appoint her to attend you. I

suppose you can trust her, for you must personate her again, and escape in her clothes, while she takes your place in this room as my prisoner."

"Clarence!"

Her voice had changed suddenly; it was no longer bitter and stridulous, but low and thrilling as he had heard her call to him that night in the patio of Robles. He turned quickly. She was leaning from the bed — her thin, white hands stretched appealingly towards him.

"Let us go together, Clarence," she said eagerly. "Let us leave this horrible place — these wicked, cruel people — forever. Come with me! Come with me to my people — to my own faith — to my own house — which shall be yours! Come with me to defend it with your good sword, Clarence, against those vile invaders with whom you have nothing in common, and who are the dirt under your feet. Yes, yes! I know it! — I have done you wrong — I have lied to you when I spoke against your skill and power. You are a hero — a born leader of men! I know it! Have I not heard it from the men who have fought against you, and yet admired and understood you, ay, better

than your own? — gallant men, Clarence, soldiers bred who did not know what you were to me nor how proud I was of you even while I hated you? Come with me! Think what we would do together — with one faith — one cause — one ambition! Think, Clarence, there is no limit you might not attain! We are no niggards of our rewards and honors — we have no hireling votes to truckle to — we know our friends! Even I — Clarence — I" — there was a strange pathos in the sudden humility that seemed to overcome her — "I have had my reward and known my power. I have been sent abroad, in the confidence of the highest — to the highest. Don't turn from me. I am offering you no bribe, Clarence, only your deserts. Come with me. Leave these curs behind, and live the hero that you are!"

He turned his blazing eyes upon her.

"If you were a man" — he began passionately, then stopped.

"No! I am only a woman and must fight in a woman's way," she interrupted bitterly. "Yes! I intreat, I implore, I wheedle, I flatter, I fawn, I lie! I creep where you stand upright, and pass through doors to which you would not bow. You wear your

blazon of honor on your shoulder; I hide mine in a slave's gown. And yet I have worked and striven and suffered! Listen, Clarence," — her voice again sank to its appealing minor, — "I know what you men call 'honor,' that which makes you cling to a merely spoken word, or an empty oath. Well, let that pass! I am weary; I have done my share of this work, you have done yours. Let us both fly; let us leave the fight to those who shall come after us, and let us go together to some distant land where the sounds of these guns or the blood of our brothers no longer cry out to us for vengeance! There are those living here — I have met them, Clarence," she went on hurriedly, "who think it wrong to lift up fratricidal hands in the struggle, yet who cannot live under the Northern yoke. They are," her voice hesitated, "good men and women — they are respected — they are" —

"Recreants and slaves, before whom you, spy as you are — stand a queen!" broke in Brant, passionately. He stopped and turned towards the window. After a pause he came back again towards the bed — paused again and then said in a lower voice — "Four years ago, Alice, in the *patio* of our

house at Robles, I might have listened to this proposal, and — I tremble to think — I might have accepted it! I loved you; I was as weak, as selfish, as unreflecting, my life was as purposeless — but for you — as the creatures you speak of. But give me now, at least, the credit of a devotion to my cause equal to your own — a credit which I have never denied you! For the night that you left me, I awoke to a sense of my own worthlessness and degradation — perhaps I have even to thank you for that awakening — and I realized the bitter truth. But that night I found my true vocation — my purpose, my manhood" —

A bitter laugh came from the pillow on which she had languidly thrown herself.

"I believe I left you with Mrs. Hooker — spare me the details."

The blood rushed to Brant's face and then receded as suddenly.

"You left me with Captain Pinckney, who had tempted you, and whom I killed!" he said furiously.

They were both staring savagely at each other. Suddenly he said, "Hush!" and sprang towards the door, as the sound of hurried footsteps echoed along the passage.

But he was too late; it was thrown open to the officer of the guard, who appeared, standing on the threshold.

"Two Confederate officers arrested hovering around our pickets. They demand to see you."

Before Brant could interpose, two men in riding cloaks of Confederate gray stepped into the room with a jaunty and self-confident air.

"Not *demand*, general," said the foremost, a tall, distinguished-looking man, lifting his hand with a graceful deprecating air. "In fact, too sorry to bother you with an affair of no importance except to ourselves. A bit of after-dinner bravado brought us in contact with your pickets, and, of course, we had to take the consequences. Served us right, and we were lucky not to have got a bullet through us. Gad! I 'm afraid my men would have been less discreet! I am Colonel Lagrange, of the 5th Tennessee; my young friend here is Captain Faulkner, of the 1st Kentucky. Some excuse for a youngster like him — none for me! I" —

He stopped, for his eyes suddenly fell upon the bed and its occupant. Both he and his companion started. But to the nat-

ural, unaffected dismay of a gentleman who had unwittingly intruded upon a lady's bed-chamber, Brant's quick eye saw a more disastrous concern superadded. Colonel Lagrange was quick to recover himself, as they both removed their caps.

"A thousand pardons," he said, hurriedly stepping backwards to the door. "But I hardly need say to a fellow-officer, general, that we had no idea of making so gross an intrusion! We heard some cock-and-bull story of your being occupied — cross-questioning an escaped or escaping nigger — or we should never have forced ourselves upon you."

Brant glanced quickly at his wife. Her face had apparently become rigid on the entrance of the two men; her eyes were coldly fixed upon the ceiling. He bowed formally, and, with a wave of his hand towards the door, said, —

"I will hear your story below, gentleman."

He followed them from the room, stopped to quietly turn the key in the lock, and then motioned them to precede him down the staircase.

CHAPTER VII.

Not a word was exchanged till they had reached the lower landing and Brant's private room. Dismissing his subaltern and orderly with a sign, Brant turned towards his prisoners. The jaunty ease, but not the self-possession, had gone from Lagrange's face; the eyes of Captain Faulkner were fixed on his older companion with a half-humorous look of perplexity.

"I am afraid I can only repeat, general, that our foolhardy freak has put us in collision with your sentries," said Lagrange, with a slight hauteur, that replaced his former jauntiness; "and we were very properly made prisoners. If you will accept my parole, I have no doubt our commander will proceed to exchange a couple of gallant fellows of yours, whom I have had the honor of meeting within our own lines, and whom you must miss probably more than I fear our superiors miss us."

"Whatever brought you here, gentle-

men," said Brant drily, "I am glad, for your sakes, that you are in uniform, although it does not, unfortunately, relieve me of an unpleasant duty."

"I don't think I understand you," returned Lagrange, coldly.

"If you had not been in uniform, you would probably have been shot down as spies, without the trouble of capture," said Brant quietly.

"Do you mean to imply, sir" — began Lagrange sternly.

"I mean to say that the existence of a Confederate spy between this camp and the division headquarters is sufficiently well known to us to justify the strongest action."

"And pray, how can that affect us?" said Lagrange haughtily.

"I need not inform so old a soldier as Colonel Lagrange that the aiding, abetting, and even receiving information from a spy or traitor within one's lines is an equally dangerous service."

"Perhaps you would like to satisfy yourself, General," said Colonel Lagrange, with an ironical laugh. "Pray do not hesitate on account of our uniform. Search us if you like."

"Not on entering my lines, Colonel," replied Brant, with quiet significance.

Lagrange's cheek flushed. But he recovered himself quickly, and with a formal bow said, —

"You will, then, perhaps, let us know your pleasure?"

"My *duty*, Colonel, is to keep you both close prisoners here until I have an opportunity to forward you to the division commander, with a report of the circumstances of your arrest. That I propose to do. How soon I may have that opportunity, or if I am ever to have it," continued Brant, fixing his clear eyes significantly on Lagrange, "depends upon the chances of war, which you probably understand as well as I do."

"We should never think of making any calculation on the action of an officer of such infinite resources as General Brant," said Lagrange ironically.

"You will, no doubt, have an opportunity of stating your own case to the division commander," continued Brant, with an unmoved face. "And," he continued, turning for the first time to Captain Faulkner," "when you tell the commander what I believe to be the fact — from your name and

resemblance — that you are a relation of the young lady who for the last three weeks has been an inmate of this house under a pass from Washington, you will, I have no doubt, favorably explain your own propinquity to my lines."

"My sister Tilly!" said the young officer impulsively. "But she is no longer here. She passed through the lines back to Washington yesterday. No," he added, with a light laugh, "I 'm afraid that excuse won't count for to-day."

A sudden frown upon the face of the elder officer, added to the perfect ingenuousness of Faulkner's speech, satisfied Brant that he had not only elicited the truth, but that Miss Faulkner had been successful. But he was sincere in his suggestion that her relationship to the young officer would incline the division commander to look leniently upon his fault, for he was conscious of a singular satisfaction in thus being able to serve her. Of the real object of the two men before him he had no doubt. They were "the friends" of his wife, who were waiting for her outside the lines! Chance alone had saved her from being arrested with them, with the consequent exposure of her treach-

ery before his own men, who, as yet, had no proof of her guilt, nor any suspicion of her actual identity. Meanwhile his own chance of conveying her with safety beyond his lines was not affected by the incident; the prisoners dare not reveal what they knew of her, and it was with a grim triumph that he thought of compassing her escape without their aid. Nothing of this, however, was visible in his face, which the younger man watched with a kind of boyish curiosity, while Colonel Lagrange regarded the ceiling with a politely repressed yawn. "I regret," concluded Brant, as he summoned the officer of the guard, "that I shall have to deprive you of each other's company during the time you are here; but I shall see that you, separately, want for nothing in your confinement."

"If this is with a view to separate interrogatory, general, I can retire now," said Lagrange, rising, with ironical politeness.

"I believe I have all the information I require," returned Brant, with undisturbed composure. Giving the necessary orders to his subaltern, he acknowledged with equal calm the formal salutes of the two prisoners as they were led away, and returned

quickly to his bedroom above. He paused instinctively for a moment before the closed door, and listened. There was no sound from within. He unlocked the door, and opened it.

So quiet was the interior that for an instant, without glancing at the bed, he cast a quick look at the window, which, till then, he had forgotten, and which he remembered gave upon the veranda roof. But it was still closed, and as he approached the bed, he saw his wife still lying there, in the attitude in which he had left her. But her eyes were ringed, and slightly filmed, as if with recent tears.

It was perhaps this circumstance that softened his voice, still harsh with command, as he said, —

"I suppose you knew those two men?"

"Yes."

"And that I have put it out of their power to help you?"

"I do."

There was something so strangely submissive in her voice that he again looked suspiciously at her. But he was shocked to see that she was quite pale now, and that the fire had gone out of her dark eyes.

"Then I may tell you what is my plan to save you. But, first, you must find this mulatto woman who has acted as your double."

"She is here."

"Here?"

"Yes."

"How do you know it?" he asked, in quick suspicion.

"She was not to leave this place until she knew I was safe within our lines. I have some friends who are faithful to me." After a pause she added, "She has been here already."

He looked at her, startled. "Impossible —I"—

"You locked the door. Yes! but she has a second key. And even if she had not, there is another entrance from that closet. You do not know this house: you have been here two weeks; I spent two years of my life, as a girl, in this room."

An indescribable sensation came over him; he remembered how he had felt when he first occupied it; this was followed by a keen sense of shame on reflecting that he had been, ever since, but a helpless puppet in the power of his enemies, and that she could have escaped if she would, even now.

"Perhaps," he said grimly, "you have already arranged your plans?"

She looked at him with a singular reproachfulness even in her submission.

"I have only told her to be ready to change clothes with me and help me color my face and hands at the time appointed. I have left the rest to you."

"Then this is my plan. I have changed only a detail. You and she must both leave this house at the same time, by different exits, but one of them must be private — and unknown to my men. Do you know of such a one?"

"Yes," she said, "in the rear of the negro quarters."

"Good," he replied, "that will be your way out. She will leave here, publicly, through the parade, armed with a pass from me. She will be overhauled and challenged by the first sentry near the guardhouse, below the wall. She will be subjected to some delay and scrutiny, which she will, however, be able to pass better than you would. This will create the momentary diversion that we require. In the mean time, you will have left the house by the rear, and you will then keep in the shadow of the hedge until

you can drop down along the Run, where it empties into the swamp. That," he continued, fixing his keen eyes upon her, "is the one weak point in the position of this place that is neither overlooked nor defended. But perhaps," he added again grimly, "you already know it."

"It is the marsh where the flowers grow, near the path where you met Miss Faulkner. I had crossed the marsh to give her a letter," she said slowly.

A bitter smile came over Brant's face, but passed as quickly.

"Enough," he said quietly, "I will meet you beside the Run, and cross the marsh with you until you are within hailing distance of your lines. I will be in plain clothes, Alice," he went on slowly, "for it will not be the commander of this force who accompanies you, but your husband, and, without disgracing his uniform, he will drop to your level; for the instant he passes his own lines, in disguise, he will become, like you, a spy, and amenable to its penalties."

Her eyes seemed suddenly to leap up to his with that strange look of awakening and enthusiasm which he had noted before. And in its complete prepossession of all her

instincts she rose from the bed, unheeding her bared arms and shoulders and loosened hair, and stood upright before him. For an instant husband and wife regarded each other as unreservedly as in their own chamber at Robles.

"When shall I go?"

He glanced through the window already growing lighter with the coming dawn. The relief would pass in a few moments; the time seemed propitious.

"At once," he said. "I will send Rose to you."

But his wife had already passed into the closet, and was tapping upon some inner door. He heard the sound of hinges turning and the rustling of garments. She reappeared, holding the curtains of the closet together with her hand, and said, —

"Go! When she comes to your office for the pass, you will know that I have gone."

He turned away.

"Stop!" she said faintly.

He turned back. Her expression had again changed. Her face was deadly pale; a strange tremor seemed to have taken possession of her. Her hands dropped from

the curtain. Her beautiful arms moved slightly forward; it seemed to him that she would in the next moment have extended them towards him. But even then she said hurriedly, "Go! Go!" and slipped again behind the curtains.

He quickly descended the stairs as the sound of trampling feet on the road, and the hurried word of command, announced the return of the scouting party. The officer had little report to make beyond the fact that a morning mist, creeping along the valley, prevented any further observation, and bade fair to interrupt their own communications with the camp. Everything was quiet in the west, although the enemy's lines along the ridge seemed to have receded.

Brant had listened impatiently, for a new idea had seized him. Hooker was of the party, and was the one man in whom he could partly confide, and obtain a disguise. He at once made his way to the commissary wagons — one of which he knew Hooker used as a tent. Hastily telling him that he wished to visit the pickets without recognition, he induced him to lend him his slouched hat and frock coat, leaving with him his own

distinguishing tunic, hat, and sword. He resisted the belt and pistols which Hooker would have forced upon him. As he left the wagon he was amusedly conscious that his old companion was characteristically examining the garments he had left behind with mingled admiration and envy. But he did not know, as he slipped out of the camp, that Mr. Hooker was quietly trying them on, before a broken mirror in the wagon-head!

The gray light of that summer morning was already so strong that, to avoid detection, he quickly dropped into the shadow of the gully that sloped towards the Run. The hot mist which the scouts had seen was now lying like a tranquil sea between him and the pickets of the enemy's rear-guard, which it seemed to submerge, and was clinging in moist tenuous swathes — like drawn-out cotton wool — along the ridge, half obliterating its face. From the valley in the rear it was already stealing in a thin white line up the slope like the advance of a ghostly column, with a stealthiness that, in spite of himself, touched him with superstitious significance. A warm perfume, languid and treacherous — as from the swamp magnolia — seemed to

rise from the half-hidden marsh. An ominous silence, that appeared to be a part of this veiling of all things under the clear opal-tinted sky above, was so little like the hush of rest and peace, that he half-yearned for the outburst of musketry and tumult of attack that might dispel it. All that he had ever heard or dreamed of the insidious South, with its languid subtleties of climate and of race, seemed to encompass him here.

But the next moment he saw the figure he was waiting for stealing towards him from the shadow of the gulley beneath the negro quarters.

Even in that uncertain light there was no mistaking the tall figure, the gaudily striped clinging gown and turbaned head. And then a strange revulsion of feeling, quite characteristic of the emotional side of his singular temperament, overcame him. He was taking leave of his wife—the dream of his youth — perhaps forever! It should be no parting in anger as at Robles; it should be with a tenderness that would blot out their past in their separate memories — God knows! it might even be that a parting at that moment was a joining of them in eter-

nity. In his momentary exaltation it even struck him that it was a duty, no less sacred, no less unselfish than the one to which he had devoted his life. The light was growing stronger; he could hear voices in the nearest picket line, and the sound of a cough in the invading mist. He made a hurried sign to the on-coming figure to follow him, ran ahead, and halted at last in the cover of a hackmatack bush. Still gazing forward over the marsh, he stealthily held out his hand behind him as the rustling skirt came nearer. At last his hand was touched — but even at that touch he started and turned quickly.

It was not his wife, but Rose! — her mulatto double! Her face was rigid with fright, her beady eyes staring in their china sockets, her white teeth chattering. Yet she would have spoken.

"Hush!" he said, clutching her hand, in a fierce whisper. "Not a word!"

She was holding something white in her fingers; he snatched it quickly. It was a note from his wife — not in the disguised hand of her first warning, but in one that he remembered as if it were a voice from their past.

"Forgive me for disobeying you to save you from capture, disgrace, or death — which would have come to you where you were going! I have taken Rose's pass. You need not fear that your honor will suffer by it, for if I am stopped I shall confess that I took it from her. Think no more of me, Clarence, but only of yourself. You are in danger."

He crushed the letter in his hand.

"Tell me," he said in a fierce whisper, seizing her arm, "and speak low. When did you leave her?"

"Sho'ly just now!" gasped the frightened woman.

He flung her aside. There might be still time to overtake and save her before she reached the picket lines. He ran up the gully, and out on to the slope towards the first guard-post. But a familiar challenge reached his ear, and his heart stopped beating.

"Who goes there?"

There was a pause, a rattle of arms — voices — another pause — and Brant stood breathlessly listening. Then the voice rose again slowly and clearly: "Pass the mulatto woman!"

Thank God! she was saved! But the thought had scarcely crossed his mind before it seemed to him that a blinding crackle of sparks burst out along the whole slope below the wall, a characteristic yell which he knew too well rang in his ears, and an undulating line of dusty figures came leaping like gray wolves out of the mist upon his pickets. He heard the shouts of his men falling back as they fired; the harsh commands of a few officers hurrying to their posts, and knew that he had been hopelessly surprised and surrounded!

He ran forward among his disorganized men. To his consternation no one seemed to heed him! Then the remembrance of his disguise flashed upon him. But he had only time to throw away his hat and snatch a sword from a falling lieutenant, before a scorching flash seemed to pass before his eyes and burn through his hair, and he dropped like a log beside his subaltern.

. . . . . .

An aching under the bandage around his head where a spent bullet had grazed his scalp, and the sound of impossible voices in his ears were all he knew as he struggled slowly back to consciousness again. Even

then it still seemed a delusion, — for he was lying on a cot in his own hospital, yet with officers of the division staff around him, and the division commander himself standing by his side, and regarding him with an air of grave but not unkindly concern. But the wounded man felt instinctively that it was not the effect of his physical condition, and a sense of shame came suddenly over him, which was not dissipated by his superior's words. For, motioning the others aside, the major-general leaned over his cot, and said, —

"Until a few moments ago, the report was that you had been captured in the first rush of the rear-guard which we were rolling up for your attack, and when you were picked up, just now, in plain clothes on the slope, you were not recognized. The one thing seemed to be as improbable as the other," he added significantly.

The miserable truth flashed across Brant's mind. Hooker must have been captured in his clothes — perhaps in some extravagant sally — and had not been recognized in the confusion by his own officers. Nevertheless, he raised his eyes to his superior.

"You got my note?"

The general's brow darkened.

"Yes," he said slowly, "but finding you thus unprepared — I had been thinking just now that you had been deceived by that woman — or by others — and that it was a clumsy forgery." He stopped, and seeing the hopeless bewilderment in the face of the wounded man, added more kindly: "But we will not talk of that in your present condition. The doctor says a few hours will put you straight again. Get strong, for I want you to lose no time — for your own sake — to report yourself at Washington."

"Report myself — at Washington!" repeated Brant slowly.

"That was last night's order," said the commander, with military curtness. Then he burst out: "I don't understand it, Brant! I believe you have been misunderstood, misrepresented, perhaps maligned — and I shall make it *my* business to see the thing through — but those are the Department orders. And for the present — I am sorry to say you are relieved of your command."

He turned away, and Brant closed his eyes. With them it seemed to him that he closed his career. No one would ever un-

derstand his explanation — even had he been tempted to give one, and he knew he never would. Everything was over now! Even this wretched bullet had not struck him fairly, and culminated his fate as it might! For an instant, he recalled his wife's last offer to fly with him beyond the seas — beyond this cruel injustice — but even as he recalled it, he knew that flight meant the worst of all — a half-confession! But she had escaped! Thank God for that! Again and again in his hopeless perplexity this comfort returned to him, — he had saved her; he had done his duty. And harping upon this in his strange fatalism, it at last seemed to him that this was for what he had lived — for what he had suffered — for what he had fitly ended his career. Perhaps it was left for him now to pass his remaining years in forgotten exile — even as his father had — his father! — his breath came quickly at the thought — God knows! perhaps as wrongfully accused! It may have been a Providence that she had borne him no child, to whom this dreadful heritage could be again transmitted.

There was something of this strange and fateful resignation in his face, a few hours

later, when he was able to be helped again into the saddle. But he could see in the eyes of the few comrades who commiseratingly took leave of him, a vague, half-repressed awe of some indefinite weakness in the man, that mingled with their heartfelt parting with a gallant soldier. Yet even this touched him no longer. He cast a glance at the house and the room where he had parted from her, at the slope from which she had passed — and rode away.

And then, as his figure disappeared down the road, the restrained commentary of wonder, surmise, and criticism broke out: —

"It must have been something mighty bad, for the old man, who swears by him, looked rather troubled. And it was deuced queer, you know, this changing clothes with somebody, just before this surprise!"

"Nonsense! It 's something away back of that! Did n't you hear the old man say that the orders for him to report himself came from Washington *last night?* No!" — the speaker lowered his voice — "Strangeways says that he had regularly sold himself out to one of them d——d secesh woman spies! It 's the old Marc Antony business over again!"

"Now I think of it," said a younger subaltern, "he did seem mightily taken with one of those quadroons or mulattoes he issued orders against. I suppose that was a blind for us! I remember the first day he saw her; he was regularly keen to know all about her."

Major Curtis gave a short laugh.

"That mulatto, Martin, was a white woman, burnt-corked! She was trying to get through the lines last night, and fell off a wall or got a knock on the head from a sentry's carbine. When she was brought in, Doctor Simmons set to washing the blood off her face; the cork came off and the whole thing came out. Brant hushed it up — and the woman, too — in his own quarters! It 's supposed now that she got away somehow in the rush!"

"It goes further back than that, gentlemen," said the adjutant authoritatively. "They say his wife was a howling secessionist, four years ago, in California, was mixed up in a conspiracy, and he had to leave on account of it. Look how thick he and that Miss Faulkner became, before he helped *her* off!"

"That 's your jealousy, Tommy; she

knew he was, by all odds, the biggest man here, and a good deal more, too, and you had no show!"

In the laugh that followed, it would seem that Brant's eulogy had been spoken and forgotten. But as Lieutenant Martin was turning away, a lingering corporal touched his cap.

"You were speaking of those prowling mulattoes, sir. You know the general passed one out this morning."

"So I have heard."

"I reckon she did n't get very far. It was just at the time that we were driven in by their first fire, and I think she got her share of it, too. Do you mind walking this way, sir!"

The lieutenant did not mind, although he rather languidly followed. When they had reached the top of the gully, the corporal pointed to what seemed to be a bit of striped calico hanging on a thorn bush in the ravine.

"That 's her," said the corporal. "I know the dress; I was on guard when she was passed. The searchers, who were picking up our men, have n't got to her yet; but she ain't moved or stirred these two

hours. Would you like to go down and see her?"

The lieutenant hesitated. He was young, and slightly fastidious as to unnecessary unpleasantness. He believed he would wait until the searchers brought her up, when the corporal might call him.

The mist came up gloriously from the swamp like a golden halo. And as Clarence Brant, already forgotten, rode moodily through it towards Washington, hugging to his heart the solitary comfort of his great sacrifice, his wife, Alice Brant, for whom he had made it, was lying in the ravine, dead and uncared for. Perhaps it was part of the inconsistency of her sex that she was pierced with the bullets of those she had loved, and was wearing the garments of the race that she had wronged.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

It was sunset of a hot day at Washington. Even at that hour the broad avenues, which diverged from the Capitol like the rays of another sun, were fierce and glittering. The sterile distances between glowed more cruelly than ever, and pedestrians, keeping in the scant shade, hesitated on the curbstones before plunging into the Sahara-like waste of crossings. The city seemed deserted. Even that vast army of contractors, speculators, place-hunters, and lobbyists, which hung on the heels of the other army, and had turned this pacific camp of the nation into a battlefield of ignoble conflict and contention — more disastrous than the one to the South — had slunk into their holes in hotel back bedrooms, in shady bar-rooms, or in the negro quarters of Georgetown, as if the majestic, white-robed Goddess enthroned upon the dome of the Capitol had at last descended among them and was

smiting to right and left with the flat and flash of her insufferable sword.

Into this stifling atmosphere of greed and corruption Clarence Brant stepped from the shadow of the War Department. For the last three weeks he had haunted its anterooms and audience-chambers, in the vain hope of righting himself before his superiors, who were content, without formulating charges against him, to keep him in this disgrace of inaction and the anxiety of suspense. Unable to ascertain the details of the accusation, and conscious of his own secret, he was debarred the last resort of demanding a court-martial, which he knew could only exonerate him by the exposure of the guilt of his wife, whom he still hoped had safely escaped. His division commander, in active operations in the field, had no time to help him at Washington. Elbowed aside by greedy contractors, forestalled by selfish politicians, and disdaining the ordinary method of influence, he had no friend to turn to. In his few years of campaigning he had lost his instinct of diplomacy, without acquiring a soldier's bluntness.

The nearly level rays of the sun forced him at last to turn aside into one of the

openings of a large building — a famous caravansary of that hotel-haunted capital, and he presently found himself in the luxurious bar-room, fragrant with mint, and cool with ice-slabs piled symmetrically on its marble counters. A few groups of men were seeking coolness at small tables with glasses before them and palm-leaf fans in their hands, but a larger and noisier assemblage was collected before the bar, where a man, collarless and in his shirt-sleeves, with his back to the counter, was pretentiously addressing them. Brant, who had moodily dropped into a chair in the corner, after ordering a cooling drink as an excuse for his temporary refuge from the stifling street, half-regretted his enforced participation in their conviviality. But a sudden lowering of the speaker's voice into a note of gloomy significance seemed familiar to him. He glanced at him quickly, from the shadow of his corner. He was not mistaken — it was Jim Hooker!

For the first time in his life, Brant wished to evade him. In the days of his own prosperity his heart had always gone out towards this old companion of his boyhood; in his present humiliation his presence jarred upon

him. He would have slipped away, but to do so he would have had to pass before the counter again, and Hooker, with the self-consciousness of a story-teller, had an eye on his audience. Brant, with a palm-leaf fan before his face, was obliged to listen.

"Yes, gentlemen," said Hooker, examining his glass dramatically, "when a man 's been cooped up in a Rebel prison, with a death line before him that he 's obliged to cross every time he wants a square drink, it seems sort of like a dream of his boyhood to be standin' here comf'ble before his liquor, alongside o' white men once more. And when he knows he 's bin put to all that trouble jest to save the reputation of another man, and the secrets of a few high and mighty ones, it 's almost enough to make his liquor go agin him." He stopped theatrically, seemed to choke emotionally over his brandy squash, but with a pause of dramatic determination finally dashed it down. "No, gentlemen," he continued gloomily, "I don't say what I 'm back in Washington *for* — I don't say what I 've been sayin' to myself when I 've bin picking the weevils outer my biscuits in Libby Prison — but ef you don't see some pretty big men in the

War Department obliged to climb down in the next few days, my name ain't Jim Hooker, of Hooker, Meacham & Co., Army Beef Contractors, and the man who saved the fight at Gray Oaks!"

The smile of satisfaction that went around his audience — an audience quick to seize the weakness of any performance — might have startled a vanity less oblivious than Hooker's; but it only aroused Brant's indignation and pity, and made his position still more intolerable. But Hooker, scornfully expectorating a thin stream of tobacco juice against the spittoon, remained for an instant gloomily silent.

"Tell us about the fight again," said a smiling auditor.

Hooker looked around the room with a certain dark suspiciousness, and then, in an affected lower voice, which his theatrical experience made perfectly audible, went on: —

"It ain't much to speak of, and if it was n't for the principle of the thing, I would n't be talking. A man who 's seen Injin fightin' don't go much on this here West Point fightin' by rule-of-three — but that ain't here or there! Well, I 'd bin out a-scoutin' — just to help the boys along, and

I was sittin' in my wagon about daybreak, when along comes a brigadier-general, and he looks into the wagon flap. I oughter to tell you first, gentlemen, that every minit he was expecting an attack — but he did n't let on a hint of it to me. 'How are you, Jim?' said he. 'How are you, general?' said I. 'Would you mind lendin' me your coat and hat?' says he. 'I 've got a little game here with our pickets, and I don't want to be recognized.' 'Anything to oblige, general,' said I, and with that I strips off my coat and hat, and he peels and puts them on. 'Nearly the same figure, Jim,' he says, lookin' at me, 'suppose you try on my things and see.' With that he hands me his coat — full uniform, by G—d! — with the little gold cords and laces and the epaulettes with a star, and I puts it on — quite innocent-like. And then he says, handin' me his sword and belt, 'Same inches round the waist, I reckon,' and I puts that on too. 'You may as well keep 'em on till I come back,' says he, 'for it 's mighty damp and malarious at this time around the swamp.' And with that he lights out. Well, gentlemen, I had n't sat there five minutes before Bang! bang! rattle! rattle!

kershiz! and I hears a yell. I steps out of the wagon; everything 's quite dark, but the rattle goes on. Then along trots an orderly, leadin' a horse. 'Mount, general,' he says, 'we 're attacked — the rear-guard 's on us!' "

He paused, looked round his audience, and then in a lower voice, said darkly, —

"I ain't a fool, an' in that minute a man's brain works at high pressure, and I saw it all! I saw the little game of the brigadier — to skunk away in my clothes and leave me to be captured in his. But I ain't a dog neither, and I mounted that horse, gentlemen, and lit out to where the men were formin'! I didn't dare to speak, lest they should know me, but I waved my sword, and by G—d! they followed me! And the next minit we was in the thick of it. I had my hat as full of holes as that ice strainer; I had a dozen bullets through my coat, the fringe of my epaulettes was shot away, but I kept the boys at their work — and we stopped 'em! Stopped 'em, gentlemen, until we heard the bugles of the rest of our division, that all this time had been rolling that blasted rear-guard over on us! And it saved the fight; but the next minute the

Johnny Rebs made a last dash and cut me off — and there I was — by G—d, a prisoner! Me that had saved the fight!"

A ripple of ironical applause went round as Hooker gloomily drained his glass, and then held up his hand in scornful deprecation.

"I said I was a prisoner, gentlemen," he went on bitterly; "but that ain't all! I asked to see Johnston, told him what I had done, and demanded to be exchanged for a general officer. He said, 'You be d——d.' I then sent word to the division commander-in-chief, and told him how I had saved Gray Oaks when his brigadier ran away, and he said, 'You be d——d.' I 've bin 'You be d——d' from the lowest non-com. to the commander-in-chief, and when I was at last exchanged, I was exchanged, gentlemen, for two mules and a broken wagon. But I 'm here, gentlemen — as I was thar!"

"Why don't you see the President about it?" asked a bystander, in affected commiseration.

Mr. Hooker stared contemptuously at the suggestion, and expectorated his scornful dissent.

"Not much!" he said. "But I 'm going

to see the man that carries him and his Cabinet in his breeches-pocket — Senator Boompointer."

"Boompointer 's a big man," continued his auditor doubtfully. "Do you know him?"

"Know him?" Mr. Hooker laughed a bitter, sardonic laugh. "Well, gentlemen, I ain't the kind o' man to go in for family influence; but," he added, with gloomy elevation, "considering he 's an intimate relation of mine, *by marriage*, I should say I did."

Brant heard no more; the facing around of his old companion towards the bar gave him that opportunity of escaping he had been waiting for. The defection of Hooker and his peculiar inventions were too characteristic of him to excite surprise, and, although they no longer awakened his good-humored tolerance, they were powerless to affect him in his greater trouble. Only one thing he learned — that Hooker knew nothing of his wife being in camp as a spy — the incident would have been too tempting to have escaped his dramatic embellishment. And the allusion to Senator Boompointer, monstrous as it seemed in Hooker's mouth, gave him a grim temptation. He had heard

of Boompointer's wonderful power; he believed that Susy would and could help him — Clarence — whether she did or did not help Hooker. But the next moment he dismissed the idea, with a flushing cheek. How low had he already sunk, even to think of it!

It had been once or twice in his mind to seek the President, and, under a promise of secrecy, reveal a part of his story. He had heard many anecdotes of his goodness of heart and generous tolerance of all things, but with this was joined — so said contemporaneous history — a flippancy of speech and a brutality of directness from which Clarence's sensibility shrank. Would he see anything in his wife but a common spy on his army; would he see anything in him but the weak victim, like many others, of a scheming woman? Stories current in camp and Congress of the way that this grim humorist had, with an apposite anecdote or a rugged illustration, brushed away the most delicate sentiment or the subtlest poetry, even as he had exposed the sham of Puritanic morality or of Epicurean ethics. Brant had even solicited an audience, but had retired awkwardly, and with his confidence

unspoken, before the dark, humorous eyes, that seemed almost too tolerant of his grievance. He had been to levées, and his heart had sunk equally before the vulgar crowd, who seemed to regard this man as their own buffoon, and the pompousness of position, learning and dignity, which he seemed to delight to shake and disturb.

One afternoon, a few days later, in sheer listlessness of purpose, he found himself again at the White House. The President was giving audience to a deputation of fanatics, who, with a pathetic simplicity almost equal to his own pathetic tolerance, were urging upon this ruler of millions the policy of an insignificant score, and Brant listened to his patient, practical response of facts and logic, clothed in simple but sinewy English, up to the inevitable climax of humorous illustration, which the young brigadier could now see was necessary to relieve the grimness of his refusal. For the first time Brant felt the courage to address him, and resolved to wait until the deputation retired. As they left the gallery he lingered in the ante-room for the President to appear. But, as he did not come, afraid of losing his chances, he returned to the gallery.

Alone in his privacy and shadow, the man he had just left was standing by a column, in motionless abstraction, looking over the distant garden. But the kindly, humorous face was almost tragic with an intensity of weariness! Every line of those strong, rustic features was relaxed under a burden which even the long, lank, angular figure — overgrown and unfinished as his own West — seemed to be distorted in its efforts to adjust itself to; while the dark, deep-set eyes were abstracted with the vague prescience of the prophet and the martyr. Shocked at that sudden change, Brant felt his cheek burn with shame. And he was about to break upon that wearied man's unbending; he was about to add his petty burden to the shoulders of this Western Atlas. He drew back silently, and descended the stairs.

But before he had left the house, while mingling with the crowd in one of the larger rooms, he saw the President reappear beside an important, prosperous-looking figure, on whom the kindly giant was now smiling with humorous toleration. He noticed the divided attention of the crowd; the name of Senator Boompointer was upon every lip:

he was nearly face to face with that famous dispenser of place and preferment — this second husband of Susy! An indescribable feeling — half cynical, half fateful — came over him. He would not have been surprised to see Jim Hooker join the throng, which now seemed to him to even dwarf the lonely central figure that had so lately touched him! He wanted to escape it all!

But his fate brought him to the entrance at the same moment that Boompointer was leaving it, and that distinguished man brushed hastily by him as a gorgeous carriage, drawn by two spirited horses, and driven by a resplendent negro coachman, dashed up. It was the Boompointer carriage.

A fashionably-dressed, pretty woman, who, in style, bearing, opulent contentment, and ingenuous self-consciousness, was in perfect keeping with the slight ostentation of the equipage, was its only occupant. As Boompointer stepped into the vehicle, her blue eyes fell for an instant on Brant. A happy, childlike pink flush came into her cheeks, and a violet ray of recognition and mischief darted from her eyes to his. For it was Susy.

CHAPTER II.

When Brant returned to his hotel there was an augmented respect in the voice of the clerk as he handed him a note with the remark that it had been left by Senator Boompointer's coachman. He had no difficulty in recognizing Susy's peculiarly Brobdingnagian school-girl hand.

"Kla'uns, I call it real mean! I believe you just *hoped* I would n't know you. If you 're a bit like your old self you 'll come right off here — this very night! I 've got a big party on — but we can talk somewhere between the acts! Have n't I growed? Tell me! And my! what a gloomy swell the young brigadier is! The carriage will come for you — so you have no excuse."

The effect of this childish note upon Brant was strangely out of proportion to its triviality. But then it was Susy's very triviality — so expressive of her characteristic irresponsibility — which had always affected him at such moments. Again, as at Robles,

he felt it react against his own ethics. Was she not right in her delightful materialism? Was she not happier than if she had been consistently true to Mrs. Peyton, to the convent, to the episode of her theatrical career, to Jim Hooker — even to himself? And did he conscientiously believe that Hooker or himself had suffered from her inconsistency? No! From all that he had heard, she was a suitable helpmate to the senator, in her social attractiveness, her charming ostentations, her engaging vanity that disarmed suspicion, and her lack of responsibility even in her partisanship. Nobody ever dared to hold the senator responsible for her promises, even while enjoying the fellowship of both, and it is said that the worthy man singularly profited by it. Looking upon the invitation as a possible distraction to his gloomy thoughts, Brant resolved to go.

The moon was high as the carriage whirled him out of the still stifling avenues towards the Soldiers' Home — a sylvan suburb frequented by cabinet ministers and the President — where the good Senator had "decreed," like Kubla Khan, "a stately pleasure dome," to entertain his friends and

partisans. As they approached the house, the trembling light like fireflies through the leaves, the warm silence broken only by a military band playing a drowsy waltz on the veranda, and the heavy odors of jessamine in the air, thrilled Brant with a sense of shame as he thought of his old comrades in the field. But this was presently dissipated by the uniforms that met him in the hall, with the presence of some of his distinguished superiors. At the head of the stairs, with a circling background of the shining crosses and ribbons of the diplomatic corps, stood Susy — her bare arms and neck glittering with diamonds, her face radiant with childlike vivacity. A significant pressure of her little glove as he made his bow seemed to be his only welcome, but a moment later she caught his arm. "You 've yet to know *him*," she said in a half whisper; "he thinks a good deal of himself — just like Jim. But he makes others believe it, and that 's where poor Jim slipped up." She paused before the man thus characteristically disposed of, and presented Brant. It was the man he had seen before — material, capable, dogmatic. A glance from his shrewd eyes — accustomed to the

weighing of men's weaknesses and ambitions — and a few hurried phrases, apparently satisfied him that Brant was not just then important or available to him, and the two men, a moment later, drifted easily apart. Brant sauntered listlessly through the crowded rooms, half remorsefully conscious that he had taken some irrevocable step, and none the less assured by the presence of two or three reporters and correspondents who were dogging his steps, or the glance of two or three pretty women whose curiosity had evidently been aroused by the singular abstraction of this handsome, distinguished, but sardonic-looking officer. But the next moment he was genuinely moved.

A tall young woman had just glided into the centre of the room with an indolent yet supple gracefulness that seemed familiar to him. A change in her position suddenly revealed her face. It was Miss Faulkner. Previously he had known her only in the riding habit of Confederate gray which she had at first affected, or in the light muslin morning dress she had worn at Gray Oaks. It seemed to him, to-night, that the studied elegance of her full dress became her still more; that the pretty willfulness of her chin

and shoulders was chastened and modified by the pearls round her fair throat. Suddenly their eyes met; her face paled visibly; he fancied that she almost leaned against her companion for support; then she met his glance again with a face into which the color had as suddenly rushed, but with eyes that seemed to be appealing to him even to the point of pain and fright. Brant was not conceited; he could see that the girl's agitation was not the effect of any mere personal influence in his recognition, but of something else. He turned hastily away; when he looked around again she was gone.

Nevertheless he felt filled with a vague irritation. Did she think him such a fool as to imperil her safety by openly recognizing her without her consent? Did she think that he would dare to presume upon the service she had done him? Or, more outrageous thought, had she heard of his disgrace, known its cause, and feared that he would drag her into a disclosure to save himself? No, no; she could not think that! She had perhaps regretted what she had done in a freak of girlish chivalry; she had returned to her old feelings and partisanship; she was only startled at meeting the

single witness of her folly. Well, she need not fear! He would as studiously avoid her hereafter, and she should know it. And yet — yes, there was a "yet." For he could not forget — indeed, in the past three weeks it had been more often before him than he cared to think — that she was the one human being who had been capable of a great act of self-sacrifice for him — her enemy, her accuser, the man who had scarcely treated her civilly. He was ashamed to remember now that this thought had occurred to him at the bedside of his wife — at the hour of her escape — even on the fatal slope on which he had been struck down. And now this fond illusion must go with the rest — the girl who had served him so loyally was ashamed of it! A bitter smile crossed his face.

"Well, I don't wonder! Here are all the women asking me who is that good-looking Mephistopheles, with the burning eyes, who is prowling around my rooms as if searching for a victim. Why, you 're smiling for all the world like poor Jim when he used to do the Red Avenger."

Susy's voice — and illustration — recalled him to himself.

"Furious I may be," he said with a gentler smile, although his eyes still glittered, "furious that I have to wait until the one woman I came to see — the one woman I have not seen for so long, while these puppets have been nightly dancing before her — can give me a few moments from them, to talk of the old days."

In his reaction he was quite sincere, although he felt a slight sense of remorse as he saw the quick, faint color rise, as in those old days, even through the to-night's powder of her cheek.

"That 's like the old Kla'uns," she said, with a slight pressure of his arm, "but we will not have a chance to speak until later. When they are nearly all gone, you 'll take me to get a little refreshment, and we 'll have a chat in the conservatory. But you must drop that awfully wicked look and make yourself generally agreeable to those women until then."

It was, perhaps, part of this reaction which enabled him to obey his hostess' commands with a certain recklessness that, however, seemed to be in keeping with the previous Satanic reputation he had all unconsciously achieved. The women listened to the cyni-

cal flippancy of this good-looking soldier with an undisguised admiration which in turn excited curiosity and envy from his own sex. He saw the whispered questioning, the lifted eyebrows, scornful shrugging of shoulders — and knew that the story of his disgrace was in the air. But I fear this only excited him to further recklessness and triumph. Once he thought he recognized Miss Faulkner's figure at a distance, and even fancied that she had been watching him; but he only redoubled his attentions to the fair woman beside him, and looked no more.

Yet he was glad when the guests began to drop off, the great rooms thinned, and Susy, appearing on the arm of her husband, coquettishly reminded him of his promise.

"For I want to talk to you of old times. General Brant," she went on, turning explanatorily to Boompointer, "married my adopted mother in California — at Robles, a dear old place where I spent my earliest years. So, you see, we are sort of relations by marriage," she added, with delightful naïveté.

Hooker's own vainglorious allusion to his relations to the man before him flashed

across Brant's mind, but it left now only a smile on his lips. He felt he had already become a part of the irresponsible comedy played around him. Why should he resist, or examine its ethics too closely? He offered his arm to Susy as they descended the stairs, but, instead of pausing in the supper-room, she simply passed through it with a significant pressure on his arm, and, drawing aside a muslin curtain, stepped into the moonlit conservatory. Behind the curtain there was a small rustic settee; without releasing his arm she sat down, so that when he dropped beside her, their hands met, and mutually clasped.

"Now, Kla'uns," she said, with a slight, comfortable shiver as she nestled beside him, "it 's a little like your chair down at old Robles, is n't it? — tell me! And to think it 's five years ago! But, Kla'uns, what 's the matter? You are changed," she said, looking at his dark face in the moonlight, "or you have something to tell me."

"I have."

"And it 's something dreadful, I know!" she said, wrinkling her brows with a pretty terror. "Could n't you pretend you had

told it to me, and let us go on just the same? Could n't you, Kla'uns? Tell me!"

"I am afraid I could n't," he said, with a sad smile.

"Is it about yourself, Kla'uns? You know," she went on with cheerful rapidity, "I know everything about you — I always did, you know — and I don't care, and never did care, and it don't, and never did, make the slightest difference to me. So don't tell it, and waste time, Kla'uns."

"It 's not about me, but about my wife!" he said slowly.

Her expression changed slightly.

"Oh, her!" she said after a pause. Then, half-resignedly, "Go on, Kla'uns."

He began. He had a dozen times rehearsed to himself his miserable story, always feeling it keenly, and even fearing that he might be carried away by emotion or morbid sentiment in telling it to another. But, to his astonishment, he found himself telling it practically, calmly, almost cynically, to his old playmate, repressing the half devotion and even tenderness that had governed him, from the time that his wife, disguised as the mulatto woman, had secretly watched him at his office, to the hour

that he had passed through the lines. He withheld only the incident of Miss Faulkner's complicity and sacrifice.

"And she got away, after having kicked you out of your place, Kla'uns?" said Susy, when he had ended.

Clarence stiffened beside her. But he felt he had gone too far to quarrel with his confidante.

"She went away. I honestly believe we shall never meet again, or I should not be telling you this!"

"Kla'uns," she said lightly, taking his hand again, "don't you believe it! She won't let you go. You 're one of those men that a woman, when she 's once hooked on to, won't let go of, even when she believes she no longer loves him, or meets bigger and better men. I reckon it 's because you 're so different from other men; maybe there are so many different things about you to hook on to, and you don't slip off as easily as the others. Now, if you were like old Peyton, her first husband, or like poor Jim, or even my Boompointer, you 'd be all right! No, my boy, all we can do is to try to keep her from getting at you here. I reckon she won't trust herself in Washington again in a hurry."

"But I cannot stay here; my career is in the field."

"Your career is alongside o' me, honey — and Boompointer. But nearer *me*. We 'll fix all that. I heard something about your being in disgrace, but the story was that you were sweet on some secesh girl down there, and neglected your business, Kla'uns. But, Lordy! to think it was only your own wife! Never mind; we 'll straighten that out. We 've had worse jobs than that on. Why, there was that commissary who was buying up dead horses at one end of the field, and selling them to the Government for mess beef at the other; and there was that general who would n't make an attack when it rained; and the other general — you know who I mean, Kla'uns — who would n't invade the State where his sister lived; but we straightened them out, somehow, and they were a heap worse than you. We 'll get you a position in the war department here, one of the bureau offices, where you keep your rank and your uniform — you don't look bad in it, Kla'uns — on better pay. And you 'll come and see me, and we 'll talk over old times."

Brant felt his heart turn sick within him.

But he was at her mercy now! He said, with an effort, —

"But I 've told you that my career — nay, my *life* — now is in the field."

"Don't you be a fool, Kla'uns, and leave it there! You have done your work of fighting — mighty good fighting, too, — and everybody knows it. You 've earned a change. Let others take your place."

He shuddered, as he remembered that his wife had made the same appeal. Was he a fool then, and these two women — so totally unlike in everything — right in this?

"Come, Kla'uns," said Susy, relapsing again against his shoulder. "Now talk to me! You don't say what you think of me, of my home, of my furniture, of my position — even of him! Tell me!"

"I find you well, prosperous, and happy," he said, with a faint smile.

"Is that all? And how do I look?"

She turned her still youthful, mischievous face towards him in the moonlight. The witchery of her blue eyes was still there as of old, the same frank irresponsibility beamed from them; her parted lips seemed to give him back the breath of his youth. He started, but she did not.

"Susy, dear!"

It was her husband's voice.

"I quite forgot," the Senator went on, as he drew the curtain aside, "that you are engaged with a friend; but Miss Faulkner is waiting to say good-night, and I volunteered to find you."

"Tell her to wait a moment," said Susy, with an impatience that was as undisguised as it was without embarrassment or confusion.

But Miss Faulkner, unconsciously following Mr. Boompointer, was already upon them. For a moment the whole four were silent, although perfectly composed. Senator Boompointer, unconscious of any infelicity in his interruption, was calmly waiting. Clarence, opposed suddenly to the young girl whom he believed was avoiding his recognition, rose, coldly imperturbable. Miss Faulkner, looking taller and more erect in the long folds of her satin cloak, neither paled nor blushed, as she regarded Susy and Brant with a smile of well-bred apology.

"I expect to leave Washington to-morrow, and may not be able to call again," she said, "or I would not have so particularly pressed a leave-taking upon you."

"I was talking with my old friend, General Brant," said Susy, more by way of introduction than apology.

Brant bowed. For an instant the clear eyes of Miss Faulkner slipped icily across his as she made him an old-fashioned Southern courtesy, and, taking Susy's arm, she left the room. Brant did not linger, but took leave of his host almost in the same breath. At the front door a well-appointed carriage of one of the Legations had just rolled into waiting. He looked back; he saw Miss Faulkner, erect and looking like a bride in her gauzy draperies, descending the stairs before the waiting servants. He felt his heart beat strangely. He hesitated, recalled himself with an effort, hurriedly stepped from the porch into the path, as he heard the carriage door close behind him in the distance, and then felt the dust from her horse's hoofs rise around him as she drove past him and away.

CHAPTER III.

Although Brant was convinced as soon as he left the house that he could not accept anything from the Boompointer influence, and that his interview with Susy was fruitless, he knew that he must temporize. While he did not believe that his old playmate would willingly betray him, he was uneasy when he thought of the vanity and impulsiveness which might compromise him — or of a possible jealousy that might seek revenge. Yet he had no reason to believe that Susy's nature was jealous, or that she was likely to have any cause; but the fact remained that Miss Faulkner's innocent intrusion upon their tête-à-tête affected him more strongly than anything else in his interview with Susy. Once out of the atmosphere of that house, it struck him, too, that Miss Faulkner was almost as much of an alien in it as himself. He wondered what she had been doing there. Could it be possible that she was obtaining information for

the South? But he rejected the idea as quickly as it had occurred to him. Perhaps there could be no stronger proof of the unconscious influence the young girl already had over him.

He remembered the liveries of the diplomatic carriage that had borne her away, and ascertained without difficulty that her sister had married one of the foreign ministers, and that she was a guest in his house. But he was the more astonished to hear that she and her sister were considered to be Southern Unionists — and were greatly petted in governmental circles for their sacrificing fidelity to the flag. His informant, an official in the State Department, added that Miss Matilda might have been a good deal of a madcap at the outbreak of the war — for the sisters had a brother in the Confederate service — but that she had changed greatly, and, indeed, within a month. "For," he added, "she was at the White House for the first time last week, and they say the President talked more to her than to any other woman."

The indescribable sensation with which this simple information filled Brant startled him more than the news itself. Hope, joy,

fear, distrust, and despair, alternately distracted him. He recalled Miss Faulkner's almost agonizing glance of appeal to him in the drawing-room at Susy's, and it seemed to be equally consistent with the truth of what he had just heard — or some monstrous treachery and deceit of which she might be capable. Even now she might be a secret emissary of some spy within the President's family; she might have been in correspondence with some traitor in the Boompointer clique, and her imploring glance only the result of a fear of exposure. Or, again, she might have truly recanted after her escapade at Gray Oaks, and feared only his recollection of her as go-between of spies. And yet both of these presumptions were inconsistent with her conduct in the conservatory. It seemed impossible that this impulsive woman, capable of doing what he had himself known her to do, and equally sensitive to the shame or joy of such impulses, should be the same conventional woman of society who had so coldly recognized and parted from him.

But this interval of doubt was transitory. The next day he received a dispatch from the War Department, ordering him to re-

port himself for duty at once. With a beating heart he hurried to the Secretary. But that official had merely left a memorandum with his assistant directing General Brant to accompany some fresh levies to a camp of "organization" near the front. Brant felt a chill of disappointment. Duties of this kind had been left to dubious regular army veterans, hurriedly displaced general officers, and favored detrimentals. But if it was not restoration, it was no longer inaction, and it was at least a release from Washington.

It was also evidently the result of some influence — but hardly that of the Boom-pointers, for he knew that Susy wished to keep him at the Capital. Was there another power at work to send him away from Washington? His previous doubts returned. Nor were they dissipated when the chief of the bureau placed a letter before him with the remark that it had been entrusted to him by a lady with the request that it should be delivered only into his own hands.

"She did not know your hotel address, but ascertained you were to call here. She said it was of some importance. There is

no mystery about it, General," continued the official with a mischievous glance at Brant's handsome, perplexed face, "although it 's from a very pretty woman — whom we all know."

"Mrs. Boompointer?" suggested Brant, with affected lightness.

It was a maladroit speech. The official's face darkened.

"We have not yet become a Postal Department for the Boompointers, General," he said dryly, "however great their influence elsewhere. It was from rather a different style of woman — Miss Faulkner. You will receive your papers later at your hotel, and leave to-night."

Brant's unlucky slip was still potent enough to divert the official attention, or he would have noticed the change in his visitor's face, and the abruptness of his departure.

Once in the street, Brant tore off the envelope. But beneath it was another, on which was written in a delicate, refined hand: "Please do not open this until you reach your destination."

Then she knew he was going! And perhaps this was her influence? All his suspicions again returned. She knew he was

going near the lines, and his very appointment, through her power, might be a plot to serve her and the enemy! Was this letter, which she was entrusting to him, the cover of some missive to her Southern friends which she expected him to carry — perhaps as a return for her own act of self-sacrifice? Was this the appeal she had been making to his chivalry, his gratitude, his honor? The perspiration stood in beads on his forehead. What defect lay hidden in his nature that seemed to make him an easy victim of these intriguing women? He had not even the excuse of gallantry; less susceptible to the potencies of the sex than most men, he was still compelled to bear that reputation. He remembered his coldness to Miss Faulkner in the first days of their meeting, and her effect upon his subalterns. Why had she selected him from among them — when she could have modeled the others like wax to her purposes? Why? And yet with the question came a possible answer that he hardly dared to think of — that in its very vagueness seemed to fill him with a stimulating thrill and hopefulness. He quickened his pace. He would take the letter, and yet be master of himself when the time came to open it.

That time came three days later, in his tent at Three Pines Crossing. As he broke open the envelope, he was relieved to find that it contained no other inclosure, and seemed intended only for himself. It began abruptly: —

"When you read this, you will understand why I did not speak to you when we met last night; why I even dreaded that you might speak to me, knowing, as I did, what I ought to tell you at that place and moment — something you could only know from me. I did not know you were in Washington, although I knew you were relieved; I had no way of seeing you or sending to you before, and I only came to Mrs. Boompointer's party in the hope of hearing news of you.

"You know that my brother was captured by your pickets in company with another officer. He thinks you suspected the truth — that he and his friend were hovering near your lines to effect the escape of the spy. But he says that, although they failed to help her, she did escape, or was passed through the lines by your connivance. He says that you seemed to know her, that from what Rose — the mulatto woman — told him,

you and she were evidently old friends. I would not speak of this, nor intrude upon your private affairs, only that I think you ought to know that *I* had no knowledge of it when I was in your house, but believed her to be a stranger to you. You gave me no intimation that you knew her, and I believed that you were frank with me. But I should not speak of this at all — for I believe that it would have made no difference to me in repairing the wrong that I thought I had done you — only that, as I am forced by circumstances to tell you the terrible ending of this story, you ought to know it all.

"My brother wrote to me that the evening after you left, the burying party picked up the body of what they believed to be a mulatto woman lying on the slope. It was not Rose, but the body of the very woman — the real and only spy — whom you had passed through the lines. She was accidentally killed by the Confederates in the first attack upon you, at daybreak. But only my brother and his friend recognized her through her blackened face and disguise, and on the plea that she was a servant of one of their friends, they got permission from the division commander to take her

away, and she was buried by her friends and among her people in the little cemetery of Three Pines Crossing, not far from where you have gone. My brother thought that I ought to tell you this: it seems that he and his friend had a strange sympathy for you in what they appear to know or guess of your relations with that woman, and I think he was touched by what he thought was your kindness and chivalry to him on account of his sister. But I do not think he ever knew, or will know, how great is the task that he has imposed upon me.

"You know now, do you not, *why* I did not speak to you when we first met; it seemed so impossible to do it in an atmosphere and a festivity that was so incongruous with the dreadful message I was charged with. And when I had to meet you later — perhaps I may have wronged you — but it seemed to me that you were so preoccupied and interested with other things that I might perhaps only be wearying you with something you cared little for, or perhaps already knew and had quickly forgotten.

"I had been wanting to say something else to you when I had got rid of my dreadful message. I do not know if you still care

to hear it. But you were once generous enough to think that I had done you a service in bringing a letter to your commander. Although I know better than anybody else the genuine devotion to your duty that made you accept my poor service, from all that I can hear, you have never had the credit of it. Will you not try me again? I am more in favor here, and I might yet be more successful in showing your superiors how true you have been to your trust, even if you have little faith in your friend, Matilda Faulkner."

For a long time he remained motionless, with the letter in his hand. Then he arose, ordered his horse, and galloped away.

There was little difficulty in finding the cemetery of Three Pines Crossing — a hillside slope, hearsed with pine and cypress, and starred with white crosses, that in the distance looked like flowers. Still less was there in finding the newer marble shaft among the older lichen-spotted slabs, which bore the simple words: "Alice Benham, Martyr." A few Confederate soldiers, under still plainer and newer wooden headstones, carved only with initials, lay at her feet. Brant sank on his knees beside the

grave, but he was shocked to see that the base of the marble was stained with the red pollen of the fateful lily, whose blossoms had been heaped upon her mound, but whose fallen petals lay dark and sodden in decay.

How long he remained there he did not know. And then a solitary bugle from the camp seemed to summon him, as it had once before summoned him, and he went away — as he had gone before — to a separation that he now knew was for all time.

Then followed a month of superintendence and drill, and the infusing into the little camp under his instruction the spirit which seemed to be passing out of his own life forever. Shut in by alien hills on the borderland of the great struggle, from time to time reports reached him of the bitter fighting, and almost disastrous successes of his old division commander. Orders came from Washington to hurry the preparation of his raw levies to the field, and a faint hope sprang up in his mind. But following it came another dispatch ordering his return to the Capital.

He reached it with neither hope nor fear — so benumbed had become his spirit under

this last trial, and what seemed to be now the mockery of this last sacrifice to his wife. Though it was no longer a question of her life and safety, he knew that he could still preserve her memory from stain by keeping her secret, even though its divulgings might clear his own. For that reason, he had even hesitated to inform Susy of her death, in the fear that, in her thoughtless irresponsibility and impulsiveness, she might be tempted to use it in his favor. He had made his late appointment a plea for her withholding any present efforts to assist him. He even avoided the Boompointers' house, in what he believed was partly a duty to the memory of his wife. But he saw no inconsistency in occasionally extending his lonely walks to the vicinity of a foreign Legation, or in being lifted with a certain expectation at the sight of its liveries on the Avenue. There was a craving for sympathy in his heart, which Miss Faulkner's letter had awakened.

Meantime, he had reported himself for duty at the War Department — with little hope, however, in that formality. But he was surprised the next day when the chief of the bureau informed him that his claim was before the President.

"I was not aware that I had presented any claim," he said, a little haughtily.

The bureau chief looked up with some surprise. This quiet, patient, reserved man had puzzled him once or twice before.

"Perhaps I should say 'case,' General," he said, drily. "But the personal interest of the highest executive in the land strikes me as being desirable in anything."

"I only mean that I have obeyed the orders of the department in reporting myself here, as I have done," said Brant, with less feeling, but none the less firmness; "and I should imagine it was not the duty of a soldier to question them. Which I fancy a 'claim' or a 'case' would imply."

He had no idea of taking this attitude before, but the disappointments of the past month, added to this first official notice of his disgrace, had brought forward that dogged, reckless, yet half-scornful obstinacy that was part of his nature.

The official smiled.

"I suppose, then, you are waiting to hear from the President," he said drily.

"I am awaiting orders from the department," returned Brant quietly, "but whether they originate in the President as

commander-in-chief, or not — it is not for me to inquire."

Even when he reached his hotel this half-savage indifference which had taken the place of his former incertitude had not changed. It seemed to him that he had reached the crisis of his life where he was no longer a free agent, and could wait, superior alike to effort or expectation. And it was with a merely dispassionate curiosity that he found a note the next morning from the President's private secretary, informing him that the President would see him early that day.

A few hours later he was ushered through the public rooms of the White House to a more secluded part of the household. The messenger stopped before a modest door and knocked. It was opened by a tall figure — the President himself. He reached out a long arm to Brant, who stood hesitatingly on the threshold, grasped his hand, and led him into the room. It had a single, large, elaborately draped window and a handsome medallioned carpet, which contrasted with the otherwise almost appalling simplicity of the furniture. A single plain angular desk, with a blotting pad and a few sheets of large

foolscap upon it, a waste-paper basket and four plain armchairs, completed the interior with a contrast as simple and homely as its long-limbed, black-coated occupant. Releasing the hand of the general to shut a door which opened into another apartment, the President shoved an armchair towards him and sank somewhat wearily into another before the desk. But only for a moment; the long shambling limbs did not seem to adjust themselves easily to the chair; the high narrow shoulders drooped to find a more comfortable lounging attitude, shifted from side to side, and the long legs moved dispersedly. Yet the face that was turned towards Brant was humorous and tranquil.

"I was told I should have to send for you if I wished to see you," he said smilingly.

Already mollified, and perhaps again falling under the previous influence of this singular man, Brant began somewhat hesitatingly to explain.

But the President checked him gently, —

"You don't understand. It was something new to my experience here to find an able-bodied American citizen with an honest genuine grievance who had to have it drawn from him like a decayed tooth. But you

have been here before. I seem to remember your face."

Brant's reserve had gone. He admitted that he had twice sought an audience — but —

"You dodged the dentist! That was wrong." As Brant made a slight movement of deprecation the President continued: "I understand! Not from fear of giving pain to yourself but to others. I don't know that *that* is right, either. A certain amount of pain must be suffered in this world — even by one's enemies. Well, I have looked into your case, General Brant." He took up a piece of paper from his desk, scrawled with two or three notes in pencil. "I think this is the way it stands. You were commanding a position at Gray Oaks when information was received by the department that, either through neglect or complicity, spies were passing through your lines. There was no attempt to prove your neglect; your orders, the facts of your personal care and precaution, were all before the department. But it was also shown that your wife, from whom you were only temporarily separated, was a notorious secessionist; that, before the war, you yourself

were suspected, and that, therefore, you were quite capable of evading your own orders, which you may have only given as a blind. On this information you were relieved by the department of your command. Later on it was discovered that the spy was none other than your own wife, disguised as a mulatto; that, after her arrest by your own soldiers, you connived at her escape — and this was considered conclusive proof of — well, let us say — your treachery."

"But I did not know it was my wife until she was arrested," said Brant impulsvely.

The President knitted his eyebrows humorously.

"Don't let us travel out of the record, General. "You 're as bad as the department. The question was one of your personal treachery, but you need not accept the fact that you were justly removed because your wife was a spy. Now, General, I am an old lawyer, and I don't mind telling you that in Illinois we would n't hang a yellow dog on that evidence before the department. But when I was asked to look into the matter by your friends, I discovered something of more importance to you. I had been trying to find a scrap of evidence

that would justify the presumption that you had sent information to the enemy. I found that it was based upon the fact of the enemy being in possession of knowledge at the first battle at Gray Oaks, which could only have been obtained from our side, and which led to a Federal disaster; that you, however, retrieved by your gallantry. I then asked the secretary if he was prepared to show that you had sent the information with that view, or that you had been overtaken by a tardy sense of repentance. He preferred to consider my suggestion as humorous. But the inquiry led to my further discovery that the only treasonable correspondence actually in evidence was found upon the body of a trusted Federal officer, and had been forwarded to the division commander. But there was no record of it in the case."

"Why, I forwarded it myself," said Brant eagerly.

"So the division commander writes," said the President, smiling, "and he forwarded it to the department. But it was suppressed in some way. Have you any enemies, General Brant?"

"Not that I know of."

"Then you probably have. You are

young and successful. Think of the hundred other officers who naturally believe themselves better than you are, and have n't a traitorous wife. Still, the department may have made an example of you for the benefit of the only man who could n't profit by it."

"Might it not have been, sir, that this suppression was for the good report of the service — as the chief offender was dead?"

"I am glad to hear you say so, General, for it is the argument I have used successfully in behalf of your wife."

"Then you know it all, sir?" said Brant after a gloomy pause.

"All, I think. Come, General, you seemed just now to be uncertain about your enemies. Let me assure you, you need not be so in regard to your friends.

"I dare to hope I have found one, sir," said Brant with almost boyish timidity.

"Oh, not me!" said the President, with a laugh of deprecation. "Some one much more potent."

"May I know his name, Mr. President?"

"No, for it is a woman. You were nearly ruined by one, General. I suppose it 's quite right that you should be saved by one. And, of course, irregularly."

"A woman!" echoed Brant.

"Yes; one who was willing to confess herself a worse spy than your wife — a double traitor — to save you! Upon my word, General, I don't know if the department was far wrong; a man with such an alternately unsettling and convincing effect upon a woman's highest political convictions should be under some restraint. Luckily the department knows nothing of it."

"Nor would any one else have known from me," said Brant eagerly. "I trust that she did not think — that you, sir, did not for an instant believe that I" —

"Oh dear, no! Nobody would have believed you! It was her free confidence to me. That was what made the affair so difficult to handle. For even her bringing your dispatch to the division commander looked bad for you; and you know he even doubted its authenticity."

"Does she — does Miss Faulkner know the spy was my wife?" hesitated Brant.

The President twisted himself in his chair, so as to regard Brant more gravely with his deep-set eyes, and then thoughtfully rubbed his leg.

"Don't let us travel out of the record,

General," he said after a pause. But as the color surged into Brant's cheek he raised his eyes to the ceiling, and said, in half-humorous recollection,—

"No, I think *that* fact was first gathered from your other friend — Mr. Hooker."

"Hooker!" said Brant, indignantly; "did he come here?"

"Pray don't destroy my faith in Mr. Hooker, General," said the President, in half-weary, half-humorous deprecation. "Don't tell me that any of his inventions are *true!* Leave me at least that magnificent liar — the one perfectly intelligible witness you have. For from the time that he first appeared here with a grievance and a claim for a commission, he has been an unspeakable joy to me and a convincing testimony to you. Other witnesses have been partisans and prejudiced; Mr. Hooker was frankly true to himself. How else should I have known of the care you took to disguise yourself, save the honor of your uniform, and run the risk of being shot as an unknown spy at your wife's side, except from his magnificent version of *his* part in it? How else should I have known the story of your discovery of the Californian

conspiracy, except from his supreme portrayal of it, with himself as the hero? No, you must not forget to thank Mr. Hooker when you meet him. Miss Faulkner is at present more accessible; she is calling on some members of my family in the next room. Shall I leave you with her?"

Brant rose with a pale face and a quickly throbbing heart as the President, glancing at the clock, untwisted himself from the chair, and shook himself out full length, and rose gradually to his feet.

"Your wish for active service is granted, General Brant," he said slowly, "and you will at once rejoin your old division commander, who is now at the head of the Tenth Army Corps. But," he said, after a deliberate pause, "there are certain rules and regulations of your service that even *I* cannot, with decent respect to your department, override. You will, therefore, understand that you cannot rejoin the army in your former position."

The slight flush that came to Brant's cheek quickly passed. And there was only the unmistakable sparkle of renewed youth in his frank eyes as he said —

"Let me go to the front again, Mr. President, and I care not *how*."

The President smiled, and, laying his heavy hand on Brant's shoulder, pushed him gently towards the door of the inner room.

"I was only about to say," he added, as he opened the door, "that it would be necessary for you to rejoin your promoted commander as a major-general. And," he continued, lifting his voice, as he gently pushed his guest into the room, "he has n't even thanked me for it, Miss Faulkner!"

The door closed behind him, and he stood for a moment dazed, and still hearing the distant voice of the President, in the room he had just quitted, now welcoming a new visitor. But the room before him, opening into a conservatory, was empty, save for a single figure that turned, half timidly, half mischievously, towards him. The same quick, sympathetic glance was in both their faces; the same timid, happy look in both their eyes. He moved quickly to her side.

"Then you knew that — that — woman was my wife?" he said, hurriedly, as he grasped her hand.

She cast a half-appealing look at his face — a half-frightened one around the room and at the open door beyond.

"Let us," she said faintly, "go into the conservatory.

. . . . . .

It is but a few years ago that the veracious chronicler of these pages moved with a wondering crowd of sightseers in the gardens of the White House. The war cloud had long since lifted and vanished; the Potomac flowed peacefully by and on to where once lay the broad plantation of a great Confederate leader — now a national cemetery that had gathered the soldier dead of both sections side by side in equal rest and honor — and the great goddess once more looked down serenely from the dome of the white Capitol. The chronicler's attention was attracted by an erect, handsome soldierly-looking man, with a beard and moustache slightly streaked with gray, pointing out the various objects of interest to a boy of twelve or fourteen at his side.

"Yes; although, as I told you, this house belongs only to the President of the United States and his family," said the gentleman, smilingly, "in that little conservatory I proposed to your mother."

"Oh! Clarence, how can you!" said the lady, reprovingly, "you know it was *long* after that!"

THE STORY OF A MINE.

To

UDO BRACHVOGEL, Esq.,

Whose clever translations of my writings have helped to introduce me to the favor of his countrymen, both here and in Germany, this little volume is heartily dedicated.

BRET HARTE.

New York, December, 1877.

THE STORY OF A MINE.

CHAPTER I.

WHO SOUGHT IT.

It was a steep trail leading over the Monterey Coast Range. Concho was very tired, Concho was very dusty, Concho was very much disgusted. To Concho's mind there was but one relief for these insurmountable difficulties, and that lay in a leathern bottle slung over the *machillas* of his saddle. Concho raised the bottle to his lips, took a long draught, made a wry face, and ejaculated:

"Carajo!"

It appeared that the bottle did not contain *aguardiente,* but had lately been filled in a tavern near *Tres Pinos* by an Irishman who sold bad American whisky under that pleasing Castilian title. Nevertheless

Concho had already nearly emptied the bottle, and it fell back against the saddle as yellow and flaccid as his own cheeks. Thus reinforced Concho turned to look at the valley behind him, from which he had climbed since noon. It was a sterile waste bordered here and there by arable fringes and *valdas* of meadow land, but in the main, dusty, dry, and forbidding. His eye rested for a moment on a low white cloud line on the eastern horizon, but so mocking and unsubstantial that it seemed to come and go as he gazed. Concho struck his forehead and winked his hot eyelids. Was it the Sierras or the cursed American whisky?

Again he recommenced the ascent. At times the half-worn, half-visible trail became utterly lost in the bare black outcrop of the ridge, but his sagacious mule soon found it again, until, stepping upon a loose boulder, she slipped and fell. In vain Concho tried to lift her from out the ruin of camp kettles, prospecting pans, and picks; she remained quietly recumbent, occasionally raising her head as if to contemplatively glance over the arid plain below. Then he had recourse to use-

less blows. Then he essayed profanity of a secular kind, such as "Assassin," "Thief," "Beast with a pig's head," "Food for the Bull's Horns," but with no effect.

Then he had recourse to the curse ecclesiastic:

"Ah, Judas Iscariot! is it thus, renegade and traitor, thou leavest me, thy master, a league from camp and supper waiting? Stealer of the Sacrament, get up!"

Still no effect. Concho began to feel uneasy; never before had a mule of pious lineage failed to respond to this kind of exhortation. He made one more desperate attempt:

"Ah, defiler of the altar! lie not there! Look!" he threw his hand into the air, extending the fingers suddenly. "Behold, fiend! I exorcise thee! Ha! tremblest! Look but a little now,—see! Apostate! I—I—excommunicate thee,—*Mula!*"

"What are you kicking up such a devil of row down there for?" said a gruff voice from the rocks above.

Concho shuddered. Could it be that the devil was really going to fly away with his mule? He dared not look up.

"Come now," continued the voice, "you

just let up on that mule, you d——d old Greaser. Don't you see she's slipped her shoulder?"

Alarmed as Concho was at the information, he could not help feeling to a certain extent relieved. She was lamed, but had not lost her standing as a good Catholic.

He ventured to lift his eyes. A stranger —an *Americano* from his dress and accent —was descending the rocks toward him. He was a slight-built man with a dark, smooth face, that would have been quite commonplace and inexpressive but for his left eye, in which all that was villainous in him apparently centered. Shut that eye, and you had the features and expression of an ordinary man; cover up those features, and the eye shone out like Eblis's own. Nature had apparently observed this too, and had, by a paralysis of the nerve, ironically dropped the corner of the upper lid over it like a curtain, laughed at her handiwork, and turned him loose to prey upon a credulous world.

"What are you doing here?" said the stranger after he had assisted Concho in bringing the mule to her feet, and a helpless halt.

"Prospecting, Senor."

The stranger turned his respectable right eye toward Concho, while his left looked unutterable scorn and wickedness over the landscape.

"Prospecting, what for?"

"Gold and silver, Senor,—yet for silver most."

"Alone?"

"Of us there are four."

The stranger looked around.

"In camp, —— a league beyond," explained the Mexican.

"Found anything?"

"Of this—much." Concho took from his saddle bags a lump of greyish iron ore, studded here and there with star points of pyrites. The stranger said nothing, but his eye looked a diabolical suggestion.

"You are lucky, friend Greaser."

"Eh?"

"It *is* silver."

"How know you this?"

"It is my business. I'm a metallurgist."

"And you can say what shall be silver and what is not."

"Yes,—see here!" The stranger took from his saddle bags a little leather case

containing some half dozen phials. One, enwrapped in dark-blue paper, he held up to Concho.

"This contains a preparation of silver."

Concho's eyes sparkled, but he looked doubtingly at the stranger.

"Get me some water in your pan."

Concho emptied his water bottle in his prospecting pan and handed it to the stranger. He dipped a dried blade of grass in the bottle and then let a drop fall from its tip in the water. The water remained unchanged.

"Now throw a little salt in the water," said the stranger.

Concho did so. Instantly a white film appeared on the surface, and presently the whole mass assumed a milky hue.

Concho crossed himself hastily, "Mother of God, it is magic!"

"It is chloride of silver, you darned fool."

Not content with this cheap experiment, the stranger then took Concho's breath away by reddening some litmus paper with the nitrate, and then completely knocked over the simple Mexican by restoring its color by dipping it in the salt water.

"You shall try me this," said Concho, offering his iron ore to the stranger;—"you shall use the silver and the salt."

"Not so fast my friend," answered the stranger; "in the first place this ore must be melted, and then a chip taken and put in shape like this,—and that is worth something, my Greaser cherub. No, sir, a man don't spend all his youth at Freiburg and Heidelburg to throw away his science gratuitously on the first Greaser he meets."

"It will cost—eh—how much?" said the Mexican eagerly.

"Well, I should say it would take about a hundred dollars and expenses to—to—find silver in that ore. But once you've got it there—you're all right for tons of it."

"You shall have it," said the now excited Mexican. "You shall have it of us,—the four! You shall come to our camp and shall melt it,—and show the silver, and—enough! Come!" and in his feverishness he clutched the hand of his companion as if to lead him forth at once.

"What are you going to do with your mule?" said the stranger.

"True, Holy Mother,—what, indeed?"

"Look yer," said the stranger, with a grim smile, "she won't stray far, I'll be bound. I've an extra pack mule above here; you can ride on her, and lead me into camp, and to-morrow come back for your beast."

Poor honest Concho's heart sickened at the prospect of leaving behind the tired servant he had objurgated so strongly a moment before, but the love of gold was uppermost. "I will come back to thee, little one, to-morrow, a rich man. Meanwhile, wait thou here, patient one,—*Adios!*—thou smallest of mules,—*Adios!*"

And, seizing the stranger's hand, he clambered up the rocky ledge until they reached the summit. Then the stranger turned and gave one sweep of his malevolent eye over the valley.

Wherefore, in after years, when their story was related, with the devotion of true Catholic pioneers, they named the mountain *"La Cañada de la Visitacion del Diablo,"* "The Gulch of the Visitation of the Devil," the same being now the boundary lines of one of the famous Mexican land grants.

CHAPTER II.

WHO FOUND IT.

Concho was so impatient to reach the camp and deliver his good news to his companions that more than once the stranger was obliged to command him to slacken his pace. "Is it not enough, you infernal Greaser, that you lame your own mule, but you must try your hand on mine? Or am I to put Jinny down among the expenses?" he added with a grin and a slight lifting of his baleful eyelid.

When they had ridden a mile along the ridge, they began to descend again toward the valley. Vegetation now sparingly bordered the trail, clumps of *chemisal,* an occasional manzanita bush, and one or two dwarfed "buckeyes" rooted their way between the interstices of the black-gray rock. Now and then, in crossing some dry gully, worn by the overflow of winter torrents from above, the grayish rock gloom was

relieved by dull red and brown masses of color, and almost every overhanging rock bore the mark of a miner's pick. Presently, as they rounded the curving flank of the mountain, from a rocky bench below them, a thin ghost-like stream of smoke seemed to be steadily drawn by invisible hands into the invisible ether. "It is the camp," said Concho, gleefully; "I will myself forward to prepare them for the stranger," and before his companion could detain him, he had disappeared at a sharp canter around the curve of the trail.

Left to himself, the stranger took a more leisurely pace, which left him ample time for reflection. Scamp as he was, there was something in the simple credulity of poor Concho that made him uneasy. Not that his moral consciousness was touched, but he feared that Concho's companions might, knowing Concho's simplicity, instantly suspect him of trading upon it. He rode on in a deep study. Was he reviewing his past life? A vagabond by birth and education, a swindler by profession, an outcast by reputation, without absolutely turning his back upon respectability, he had trembled on the perilous

edge of criminality ever since his boyhood. He did not scruple to cheat these Mexicans,—they were a degraded race,—and for a moment he felt almost an accredited agent of progress and civilization. We never really understand the meaning of enlightenment until we begin to use it aggressively.

A few paces further on four figures appeared in the now gathering darkness of the trail. The stranger quickly recognized the beaming smile of Concho, foremost of the party. A quick glance at the faces of the others satisfied him that while they lacked Concho's good humor, they certainly did not surpass him in intellect. "Pedro" was a stout *vaquero*. "Manuel" was a slim half-breed and ex-convert of the Mission of San Carmel, and "Miguel" a recent butcher of Monterey. Under the benign influences of Concho that suspicion with which the ignorant regard strangers died away, and the whole party escorted the stranger—who had given his name as Mr. Joseph Wiles—to their camp-fire. So anxious were they to begin their experiments that even the instincts of hospitality were forgotten, and it was not until Mr. Wiles

—now known as "Don Jose"—sharply reminded them that he wanted some "grub," that they came to their senses. When the frugal meal of *tortillas, frijoles,* salt pork, and chocolate was over, an oven was built of the dark-red rock brought from the ledge before them, and an earthenware jar, glazed by some peculiar local process, tightly fitted over it, and packed with clay and sods. A fire was speedily built of pine boughs continually brought from a wooded ravine below, and in a few moments the furnace was in full blast. Mr. Wiles did not participate in these active preparations, except to give occasional directions between his teeth, which were contemplatively fixed over a clay pipe as he lay comfortably on his back on the ground. Whatever enjoyment the rascal may have had in their useless labors he did not show it, but it was observed that his left eye often followed the broad figure of the ex-vaquero, Pedro, and often dwelt on that worthy's beetling brows and half-savage face. Meeting that baleful glance once, Pedro growled out an oath, but could not resist a hideous fascination that caused him again and again to seek it.

The scene was weird enough without Wiles's eye to add to its wild picturesqueness. The mountain towered above,—a heavy Rembrandtish mass of black shadow,—sharply cut here and there against a sky so inconceivably remote that the world-sick soul must have despaired of ever reaching so far, or of climbing its steel-blue walls. The stars were large, keen, and brilliant, but cold and steadfast. They did not dance nor twinkle in their adamantine setting. The furnace fire painted the faces of the men an Indian red, glanced on brightly colored blanket and *serape,* but was eventually caught and absorbed in the waiting shadows of the black mountain, scarcely twenty feet from the furnace door. The low, half-sung, half-whispered foreign speech of the group, the roaring of the furnace, and the quick, sharp yelp of a *coyote* on the plain below were the only sounds that broke the awful silence of the hills.

It was almost dawn when it was announced that the ore had fused. And it was high time, for the pot was slowly sinking into the fast-crumbling oven. Concho uttered a jubilant "God and Liberty," but

Don Jose Wiles bade him be silent and bring stakes to support the pot. Then Don Jose bent over the seething mass. It was for a moment only. But in that moment this accomplished metallurgist, Mr. Joseph Wiles, had quietly dropped a silver half dollar into the pot!

Then he charged them to keep up the fires and went to sleep—all but one eye.

Dawn came with dull beacon fires on the near hill tops, and, far in the East, roses over the Sierran snow. Birds twittering in the alder fringes a mile below, and the creaking of wagon wheels,—the wagon itself a mere cloud of dust in the distant road,—were heard distinctly. Then the melting pot was solemnly broken by Don Jose, and the glowing incandescent mass turned into the road to cool.

And then the metallurgist chipped a small fragment from the mass and pounded it, and chipped another smaller piece and pounded that, and then subjected it to acid, and then treated it to a salt bath which became at once milky,—and at last produced a white something,—*mirabile dictu!*—two cents' worth of silver!

Concho shouted with joy; the rest gazed

at each other doubtingly and distrustfully; companions in poverty, they began to diverge and suspect each other in prosperity. Wiles's left eye glanced ironically from the one to the other.

"Here is the hundred dollars, Don Jose," said Pedro, handing the gold to Wiles with a decidedly brusque intimation that the services and presence of a stranger were no longer required.

Wiles took the money with a gracious smile and a wink that sent Pedro's heart into his boots, and was turning away, when a cry from Manuel stopped him. "The pot,—the pot,—it has leaked! look! behold! see!"

He had been cleaning away the crumbled fragments of the furnace to get ready for breakfast, and had disclosed a shining pool of *quicksilver!*

Wiles started, cast a rapid glance around the group, saw in a flash that the metal was unknown to them,—and then said quietly:

"It is not silver."

"Pardon, Senor, it is, and still molten."

Wiles stooped and ran his fingers through the shining metal.

"Mother of God,—what is it then?—magic?"

"No, only base metal." But here, Concho, emboldened by Wiles's experiment, attempted to seize a handful of the glistening mass, that instantly broke through his fingers in a thousand tiny spherules, and even sent a few globules up his shirt sleeves, until he danced around in mingled fear and childish pleasure.

"And it is not worth the taking?" queried Pedro of Wiles.

Wiles's right eye and bland face were turned toward the speaker, but his malevolent left was glancing at the dull red-brown rock on the hill side.

"No!"—and turning abruptly away, he proceeded to saddle his mule.

Manuel, Miguel, and Pedro, left to themselves, began talking earnestly together, while Concho, now mindful of his crippled mule, made his way back to the trail where he had left her. But she was no longer there. Constant to her master through beatings and bullyings, she could not stand incivility and inattention. There are certain qualities of the sex that belong to all animated nature.

Inconsolable, footsore, and remorseful, Concho returned to the camp and furnace, three miles across the rocky ridge. But what was his astonishment on arriving to find the place deserted of man, mule, and camp equipage. Concho called aloud. Only the echoing rocks grimly answered him. Was it a trick? Concho tried to laugh. Ah—yes—a good one,—a joke,—no—no—they *had* deserted him. And then poor Concho bowed his head to the ground, and falling on his face, cried as if his honest heart would break.

The tempest passed in a moment; it was not Concho's nature to suffer long nor brood over an injury. As he raised his head again his eye caught the shimmer of the quicksilver,—that pool of merry antic metal that had so delighted him an hour before. In a few moments Concho was again disporting with it; chasing it here and there, rolling it in his palms and laughing with boy-like glee at its elusive freaks and fancies. "Ah, sprightly one,—skipjack,—there thou goest,—come here. This way,—now I have thee, little one,—come, *muchacha,*—come and kiss me," until he had quite forgotten the defection

of his companions. And even when he shouldered his sorry pack, he was fain to carry his playmate away with him in his empty leathern flask.

And yet I fancy the sun looked kindly on him as he strode cheerily down the black mountain side, and his step was none the less free nor light that he carried with him neither the brilliant prospects nor the crime of his late comrades.

CHAPTER III.

WHO CLAIMED IT.

The fog had already closed in on Monterey, and was now rolling, a white, billowy sea above, that soon shut out the blue breakers below. Once or twice in descending the mountain Concho had overhung the cliff and looked down upon the curving horse-shoe of a bay below him,—distant yet many miles. Earlier in the afternoon he had seen the gilt cross on the white-faced Mission flare in the sunlight, but now all was gone. By the time he reached the highway of the town it was quite dark, and he plunged into the first *fonda* at the wayside, and endeavored to forget his woes and his weariness in *aguardiente*. But Concho's head ached, and his back ached, and he was so generally distressed that he bethought him of a *medico*,—an American doctor,—lately come into the town, who

had once treated Concho and his mule with apparently the same medicine, and after the same heroic fashion. Concho reasoned, not illogically, that if he were to be physicked at all he ought to get the worth of his money. The grotesque extravagance of life, of fruit and vegetables, in California was inconsistent with infinitesimal doses. In Concho's previous illness the doctor had given him a dozen 4 grain quinine powders.

The following day the grateful Mexican walked into the Doctor's office—cured. The Doctor was gratified until, on examination, it appeared that to save trouble, and because his memory was poor, Concho had taken all the powders in one dose. The Doctor shrugged his shoulders and—altered his practice.

"Well," said Dr. Guild, as Concho sank down exhaustedly in one of the Doctor's two chairs, "what now? Have you been sleeping again in the *tule* marshes, or are you upset with commissary whisky? Come, have it out."

But Concho declared that the devil was in his stomach, that Judas Iscariot had possessed himself of his spine, that imps

were in his forehead, and that his feet had been scourged by Pontius Pilate.

"That means 'blue mass,'" said the Doctor. And gave it to him,—a bolus as large as a musket ball, and as heavy.

Concho took it on the spot, and turned to go.

"I have no money, Señor Medico."

"Never mind. It's only a dollar, the price of the medicine."

Concho looked guilty at having gulped down so much cash. Then he said timidly:

"I have no money, but I have got here what is fine and jolly. It is yours." And he handed over the contents of the precious tin can he had brought with him.

The Doctor took it, looked at the shivering volatile mass and said, "Why this is quicksilver!"

Concho laughed, "Yes, very quick silver, so!" and he snapped his fingers to show its sprightliness.

The Doctor's face grew earnest; "Where did you get this, Concho?" he finally asked.

"It ran from the pot in the mountains beyond."

The Doctor looked incredulous. Then Concho related the whole story.

"Could you find that spot again?"

"*Madre de Dios,* yes,—I have a mule there; may the devil fly away with her!"

"And you say your comrades saw this?"

"Why not?"

"And you say they afterwards left you,—deserted you?"

"They did, ingrates!"

The Doctor arose and shut his office door. "Hark ye, Concho," he said, "that bit of medicine I gave you just now was worth a dollar. It was worth a dollar because the material of which it was composed was made from the stuff you have in that can,—quicksilver or mercury. It is one of the most valuable of metals, especially in a gold-mining country. My good fellow, if you know where to find enough of it, your fortune is made."

Concho rose to his feet.

"Tell me, was the rock you built your furnace of red?"

"*Si, Señor.*"

"And brown?"

"*Si, Señor.*"

"And crumbled under the heat?"

"As to nothing."

"And did you see much of this red rock?"

"The mountain mother is in travail with it."

"Are you sure that your comrades have not taken possession of the mountain mother?"

"As how?"

"By claiming its discovery under the mining laws, or by pre-emption?"

"They shall not."

"But how will you, single-handed, fight the four; for I doubt not your scientific friend has a hand in it?"

"I will fight."

"Yes, my Concho, but suppose I take the fight off your hands. Now, here's a proposition: I will get half a dozen *Americanos* to go in with you. You will have to get money to work the mine,—you will need funds. You shall share half with them. They will take the risk, raise the money, and protect you."

"I see," said Concho, nodding his head and winking his eyes rapidly. *"Bueno!"*

"I will return in ten minutes," said the Doctor, taking his hat.

He was as good as his word. In ten minutes he returned with six original locaters, a board of directors, a president, secretary, and a deed of incorporation of the 'Blue Mass Quicksilver Mining Co.' This latter was a delicate compliment to the Doctor, who was popular. The President added to these necessary articles a revolver.

"Take it," he said, handing over the weapon to Concho. "Take it; my horse is outside; take that, ride like h—l and hang on to the claim until we come!"

In another moment Concho was in the saddle. Then the mining director lapsed into the physician.

"I hardly know," said Dr. Guild, doubtfully, "if in your present condition you ought to travel. You have just taken a powerful medicine," and the Doctor looked hypocritically concerned.

"Ah,—the devil!" laughed Concho, "what is the quicksilver that is *in* to that which is *out? Hoopa, la Mula!*" and, with a clatter of hoofs and jingle of spurs, he was presently lost in the darkness.

"You were none too soon, gentlemen," said the American *Alcalde,* as he drew up

before the Doctor's door. "Another company has just been incorporated for the same location, I reckon."

"Who are they?"

"Three Mexicans,—Pedro, Manuel, and Miguel, headed by that d—d cock-eyed Sydney Duck, Wiles."

"Are they here?"

"Manuel and Miguel, only. The others are over at *Tres Pinos* lally-gaging Roscommon and trying to rope him in to pay off their whisky bills at his grocery."

"If that's so we needn't start before sunrise, for they're sure to get roaring drunk."

And this legitimate successor of the grave Mexican *Alcaldes,* having thus delivered his impartial opinion, rode away.

Meanwhile, Concho the redoubtable, Concho the fortunate, spared neither *riata* nor spur. The way was dark, the trail obscure and at times even dangerous, and Concho, familiar as he was with these mountain fastnesses, often regretted his sure-footed *Francisquita.* "Care not, O Concho," he would say to himself, "'tis but a little while, only a little while, and thou shalt have another *Francisquita* to bless thee. Eh, skipjack, there was a fine

music to thy dancing. A dollar for an ounce,—'tis as good as silver, and merrier." Yet for all his good spirits he kept a sharp lookout at certain bends of the mountain trail; not for assassins or brigands, for Concho was physically courageous, but for the Evil One, who, in various forms, was said to lurk in the Santa Cruz Range, to the great discomfort of all true Catholics. He recalled the incident of *Ignacio,* a muleteer of the Franciscan Friars, who, stopping at the *Angelus* to repeat the *Credo,* saw Luzbel plainly in the likeness of a monstrous grizzly bear, mocking him by sitting on his haunches and lifting his paws, clasped together, as if in prayer. Nevertheless, with one hand grasping his reins and his rosary, and the other clutching his whisky flask and revolver, he fared on so rapidly that he reached the summit as the earlier streaks of dawn were outlining the far-off Sierran peaks. Tethering his horse on a strip of tableland, he descended cautiously afoot until he reached the bench, the wall of red rock and the crumbled and dismantled furnace. It was as he had left it that morning; there was no trace of

recent human visitation. Revolver in hand, Concho examined every cave, gully, and recess, peered behind trees, penetrated copses of buckeye and manzanita, and listened. There was no sound but the faint soughing of the wind over the pines below him. For a while he paced backward and forward with a vague sense of being a sentinel, but his mercurial nature soon rebelled against this monotony, and soon the fatigues of the day began to tell upon him. Recourse to his whisky flask only made him the drowsier, until at last he was fain to lie down and roll himself up tightly in his blanket. The next moment he was sound asleep.

His horse neighed twice from the summit, but Concho heard him not. Then the brush crackled on the ledge above him, a small fragment of rock rolled near his feet, but he stirred not. And then two black figures were outlined on the crags beyond.

"St-t-t!" whispered a voice. "There is one lying beside the furnace." The speech was Spanish, but the voice was Wiles's.

The other figure crept cautiously to the edge of the crag and looked over. "It is

Concho, the imbecile," said Pedro, contemptuously.

"But if he should not be alone, or if he should waken?"

"I will watch and wait. Go you and affix the notification."

Wiles disappeared. Pedro began to creep down the face of the rocky ledge, supporting himself by *chemisal* and brushwood.

The next moment Pedro stood beside the unconscious man. Then he looked cautiously around. The figure of his companion was lost in the shadow of the rocks above; only a slight crackle of brush betrayed his whereabouts. Suddenly Pedro flung his *serape* over the sleeper's head, and then threw his powerful frame and tremendous weight full upon Concho's upturned face, while his strong arms clasped the blanket-pinioned limbs of his victim. There was a momentary unheaval, a spasm, and a struggle; but the tightly-rolled blanket clung to the unfortunate man like cerements.

There was no noise, no outcry, no sound of struggle. There was nothing to be seen but the peaceful, prostrate figures of the

two men darkly outlined on the ledge. They might have been sleeping in each other's arms. In the black silence the stealthy tread of Wiles in the brush above was distinctly audible.

Gradually the struggles grew fainter. Then a whisper from the crags:

"I can't see you. What are you doing?"

"Watching!"

"Sleeps he?"

"He sleeps!"

"Soundly?"

"Soundly."

"After the manner of the dead?"

"After the fashion of the dead!"

The last tremor had ceased. Pedro rose as Wiles descended.

"All is ready," said Wiles; "you are a witness of my placing the notifications?"

"I am a witness."

"But of this one?" pointing to Concho. "Shall we leave him here?"

"A drunken imbecile,—why not?"

Wiles turned his left eye on the speaker. They chanced to be standing nearly in the same attitude they had stood the preceding night. Pedro uttered a cry and an imprecation, "Carramba! Take your devil's

eye from me! What see you? Eh,—what?"

"Nothing, good Pedro," said Wiles, turning his bland right cheek to Pedro. The infuriated and half-frightened ex-vaquero returned the long knife he had half-drawn from its sheath, and growled surlily: "Go on then! But keep thou on that side, and I will on this." And so, side by side, listening, watching, distrustful of all things, but mainly of each other, they stole back and up into those shadows from which they might like evil spirits have been poetically evoked.

A half hour passed, in which the east brightened, flashed, and again melted into gold. And then the sun came up haughtily, and a fog that had stolen across the summit in the night arose and fled up the mountain side, tearing its white robes in its guilty haste, and leaving them fluttering from tree and crag and scar. A thousand tiny blades, nestling in the crevices of rocks, nurtured in storms and rocked by the trade winds, stretched their wan and feeble arms toward Him; but Concho the strong, Concho the brave, Concho the light-hearted spake not nor stirred.

CHAPTER IV.

WHO TOOK IT.

THERE was persistent neighing on the summit. Concho's horse wanted his breakfast.

This protestation reached the ears of a party ascending the mountain from its western face. To one of the party it was familiar.

"Why, blank it all, that's Chiquita. That d—d Mexican's lying drunk somewhere," said the President of the B. M. Co.

"I don't like the look of this at all," said Dr. Guild, as they rode up beside the indignant animal. "If it had been an American, it might have been carelessness, but no Mexican ever forgets his beast. Drive ahead, boys; we may be too late."

In half an hour they came in sight of

the ledge below, the crumbled furnace, and the motionless figure of Concho, wrapped in a blanket, lying prone in the sunlight.

"I told you so,—drunk!" said the President.

The Doctor looked grave, but did not speak. They dismounted and picketed their horses. Then crept on all fours to the ledge above the furnace. There was a cry from Secretary Gibbs, "Look yer. Some fellar has been jumping us, boys. See these notices."

There were two notices on canvas affixed to the rock, claiming the ground, and signed by Pedro, Manuel, Miguel, Wiles, and Roscommon.

"This was done, Doctor, while your trustworthy Greaser locater,—d——n him, —lay there drunk. What's to be done now?"

But the Doctor was making his way to the unfortunate cause of their defeat, lying there quite mute to their reproaches. The others followed him.

The Doctor knelt beside Concho, unrolled him, placed his hand upon his wrist, his ear over his heart, and then said:

"Dead."

"Of course. He got medicine of you last night. This comes of your d—d heroic practice."

But the Doctor was too much occupied to heed the speaker's raillery. He had peered into Concho's protuberant eye, opened his mouth, and gazed at the swollen tongue, and then suddenly rose to his feet.

"Tear down those notices, boys, but keep them. Put up your own. Don't be alarmed, you will not be interfered with, for here is murder added to robbery."

"Murder?"

"Yes," said the Doctor, excitedly, "I'll take my oath on any inquest that this man was strangled to death. He was surprised while asleep. Look here." He pointed to the revolver still in Concho's stiffening hand, which the murdered man had instantly cocked, but could not use in the struggle.

"That's so," said the President, "no man goes to sleep with a cocked revolver. What's to be done?"

"Everything," said the Doctor. "This deed was committed within the last two hours; the body is still warm. The murderer did not come our way, or we should

have met him on the trail. He is, if anywhere, between here and *Tres Pinos.*"

"Gentlemen," said the President, with a slight preparatory and half judicial cough, "two of you will stay here and stick! The others will follow me to *Tres Pinos.* The law has been outraged. You understand the Court!"

By some odd influence the little group of half-cynical, half-trifling, and wholly reckless men had become suddenly sober, earnest citizens. They said, "Go on," nodded their heads, and betook themselves to their horses.

"Had we not better wait for the inquest and swear out a warrant?" said the Secretary, cautiously.

"How many men have we?"

"Five!"

"Then," said the President, summing up the Revised Statutes of the State of California in one strong sentence; "then we don't want no d——d warrant."

CHAPTER V.

WHO HAD A LIEN ON IT.

It was high noon at *Tres Pinos*. The three pines from which it gained its name, in the dusty road and hot air, seemed to smoke from their balsamic spires. There was a glare from the road, a glare from the sky, a glare from the rocks, a glare from the white canvas roofs of the few shanties and cabins which made up the village. There was even a glare from the unpainted red-wood boards of Roscommon's grocery and tavern, and a tendency of the warping floor of the veranda to curl up beneath the feet of the intruder. A few mules, near the watering trough, had shrunk within the scant shadow of the corral.

The grocery business of Mr. Roscommon, although adequate and sufficient for the village, was not exhausting nor overtaxing to the proprietor; the refilling of the

pork and flour barrel of the average miner was the work of a brief hour on Saturday nights, but the daily replenishment of the average miner with whisky was arduous and incessant. Roscommon spent more time behind his bar than his grocer's counter. Add to this the fact that a long shed-like extension or wing bore the legend, "Cosmopolitan Hotel, Board or Lodging by the Day or Week. M. Roscommon," and you got an idea of the variety of the proprietor's functions. The "hotel," however, was more directly under the charge of Mrs. Roscommon, a lady of thirty years, strong, truculent, and good-hearted.

Mr. Roscommon had early adopted the theory that most of his customers were insane, and were to be alternately bullied or placated, as the case might be. Nothing that occurred, no extravagance of speech nor act, ever ruffled his equilibrium, which was as dogged and stubborn as it was outwardly calm. When not serving liquor, or in the interval while it was being drank, he was always wiping his counter with an exceedingly dirty towel,—or indeed anything that came handy. Miners, noticing this purely perfunctory habit, occasionally

supplied him slily with articles inconsistent with their service,—fragments of their shirts and underclothing, flour sacking, tow, and once with a flannel petticoat of his wife's, stolen from the line in the back-yard. Roscommon would continue his wiping without looking up, but yet conscious of the presence of each customer. "And it's not another dhrop ye'll git, Jack Brown, until ye've wiped out the black score that stands agin ye." "And it's there ye are, darlint, and it's here's the bottle that's been lukin' for ye sins Saturday." "And fwhot hev you done with the last I sent ye, ye divil of a McCorkle, and here's me back that's bruk entoirely wid dipping intil the pork barl to giv ye the best sides, and ye spending yur last cint on a tare into Gilroy. Whist! and if it's fer foighting ye are, boys, there's an illigant bit of sod beyant the corral, and it may be meself 'll come out with a shtick and be sociable."

On this particular day, however, Mr. Roscommon was not in his usual spirits, and when the clatter of horses' hoofs before the door announced the approach of strangers, he absolutely ceased wiping his

counter and looked up as Dr. Guild, the President, and Secretary of the new Company strode into the shop.

"We are looking," said the President, "for a man by the name of Wiles, and three Mexicans known as Pedro, Manuel, and Miguel."

"Ye are?"

"We are!"

"Faix, and I hope ye'll foind 'em. And if ye'll git from 'em the score I've got agin 'em, darlint, I'll add a blessing to it."

There was a laugh at this from the bystanders, who, somehow, resented the intrusion of these strangers.

"I fear you will find it no laughing matter, gentlemen," said Dr. Guild, a little stiffly, "when I tell you that a murder has been committed, and the men I am seeking within an hour of that murder put up that notice signed by their names," and Dr. Guild displayed the paper.

There was a breathless silence among the crowd as they eagerly pressed around the Doctor. Only Roscommon kept on wiping his counter.

"You will observe, gentlemen, that the

name of Roscommon also appears on this paper as one of the original locaters."

"And sure, darlint," said Roscommon, without looking up, "if ye've no better ividince agin them boys then you have forninst me, it's home ye'd bether be riding to wanst. For it's meself as hasn't sturred fut out of the store the day and noight,—more betoken as the boys I've sarved kin testify."

"That's so, Ross, right," chorused the crowd, "We've been running the old man all night."

"Then how comes your name on this paper?"

"O murdher! will ye listen to him, boys? As if every felly that owed me a whisky bill didn't come to me and say, 'Ah, Misther Roscommon,' or 'Moike,' as the case moight be, sure it's an illigant sthrike I've made this day, and it's meself that has put down your name as an original locater, and yer fortune's made, Mr. Roscommon, and will yer fill me up another quart for the good luck betune you and me. Ah, but ask Jack Brown over yar if it isn't sick that I am of his original locations."

The laugh that followed this speech, and its practical application, convinced the party that they had blundered, that they could obtain no clue to the real culprits here, and that any attempt by threats would meet violent opposition. Nevertheless the Doctor was persistent:

"When did you see these men last?"

"When did I see them, is it? Bedad, what with sarvin up the liquor and keeping me counters dry and swate, I never see them at all."

"That's so, Ross," chorused the crowd again, to whom the whole proceeding was delightfully farcical.

"Then I can tell you, gentlemen," said the Doctor, stiffly, "that they were in Monterey last night, that they did not return on that trail this morning, and that they must have passed here at daybreak."

With these words, which the Doctor regretted as soon as delivered, the party rode away.

Mr. Roscommon resumed his service and counter wiping. But late that night, when the bar was closed and the last loiterer was summarily ejected, Mr. Roscommon, in the conjugal privacy of his chamber, pro-

duced a legal-looking paper. "Read it, Maggie, darlint, for it's meself never had the larning nor the parts."

Mistress Roscommon took the paper:

"Shure, it's law papers, making over some property to yis. O Moike! ye havn't been spekilating!"

"Whist! and fwhotz that durty gray paper wid the sales and flourishes?"

"Faix, it bothers me intoirely. Shure it oin't in English."

"Whist! Maggie, it's a Spanish grant!"

"A Spanish grant? O Moike, and what did ye giv for it?"

Mr. Roscommon laid his finger beside his nose, and said softly, "Whishky!"

PART II.—IN THE COURTS.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW A GRANT WAS GOT FOR IT.

While the Blue Mass Company, with more zeal than discretion, were actively pursuing Pedro and Wiles over the road to *Tres Pinos,* Senors Miguel and Manuel were comfortably seated in a *fonda* at Monterey, smoking *cigarritos* and discussing their late discovery. But they were in no better mood than their late companions, and it appeared from their conversation that in an evil moment they had sold out their interest in the alleged silver mine to Wiles and Pedro for a few hundred dollars,—succumbing to what they were assured would be an active opposition on the part of the *Americanos.* The astute reader will easily understand that the accom-

plished Mr. Wiles did not inform them of its value as a quicksilver mine, although he was obliged to impart his secret to Pedro as a necessary accomplice and reckless coadjutor. That Pedro felt no qualms of conscience in thus betraying his two comrades may be inferred from his recent direct and sincere treatment of Concho, and that he would, if occasion offered or policy made it expedient, as calmly obliterate Mr. Wiles, that gentleman himself never for a moment doubted.

"If we had waited but a little he would have given more,—this cock-eye!" regretted Manuel querulously.

"Not a *peso,*" said Miguel, firmly.

"And why, my Miguel? Thou knowest we could have worked the mine ourselves."

"Good, and lost even that labor. Look you, little brother. Show to me now the Mexican that has ever made a *real* of a mine in California. How many, eh? None! Not a one. Who owns the Mexican's mine, eh? *Americanos!* Who takes the money from the Mexican's mine? *Americanos!* Thou rememberest Briones, who spent a gold mine to make a silver

one? Who has the lands and house of Briones? *Americanos!* Who has the cattle of Briones? *Americanos!* Who has the mine of Briones? *Americanos!* Who has the silver Briones never found? *Americanos!* Always the same! Forever! Ah! *carramba!*"

Then the Evil One evidently took it into his head and horns to worry and toss these men—comparatively innocent as they were—still further, for a purpose. For presently to them appeared one Victor Garcia, whilom a clerk of the *Ayuntamiento,* who rallied them over *aguardiente,* and told them the story of the quicksilver discovery, and the two mining claims taken out that night by Concho and Wiles. Whereat Manuel exploded with profanity and burnt blue with sulphurous malediction; but Miguel, the recent ecclesiastic, sat livid and thoughtful.

Finally came a pause in Manuel's bombardment, and something like this conversation took place between the cooler actors:

Miguel (thoughtfully). "When was it thou didst petition for lands in the valley, friend Victor?"

Victor (amazedly). "Never! It is a sterile waste. Am I a fool?"

Miguel (softly). "Thou didst. Of thy Governor, Micheltorena. I have seen the application."

Victor (beginning to appreciate a rodential odor). "*Si!* I had forgotten. Art thou sure it was in the valley?"

Miguel (persuasively). "In the valley and up the *falda.*"[1]

Victor (with decision). "Certainly. Of a verity,—the *falda* likewise."

Miguel (eying Victor). "And yet thou hadst not the grant. Painful is it that it should have been burned with the destruction of the other archives, by the *Americanos* at Monterey."

Victor (cautiously feeling his way). "*Possiblemente.*"

Miguel. "It might be wise to look into it."

Victor (bluntly). "As why?"

Miguel. "For our good and thine, friend Victor. We bring thee a discovery; thou bringest us thy skill, thy experience,

[1] *Falda*, or *valda*, *i. e.*, that part of the skirt of a woman's robe that breaks upon the ground, and is also applied to the final slope of a hill, from the angle that it makes upon the level plain.

thy government knowledge,—thy Custom House paper."[1]

Manuel (breaking in drunkenly). "But for what? We are Mexicans. Are we not fated? We shall lose. Who shall keep the *Americanos* off?"

Miguel. "We shall take *one* American in! Ha! seest thou? This American comrade shall bribe his courts, his *corregidores.* After a little he shall supply the men who invent the machine of steam, the mill, the furnace, eh?"

Victor. "But who is he,—not to steal?"

Miguel. "He is that man of Ireland, a good Catholic, at *Tres Pinos.*"

Victor and Manuel (*omnes*). "Roscommon?"

Miguel. "Of the same. We shall give him a share for the provisions, for the tools, for the *aguardiente.* It is of the Irish that the *Americanos* have great fear. It is of them that the votes are made,—that the President is chosen. It is of him that they make the *Alcalde* in San Francisco. And we are of the Church like him."

They said *"Bueno"* altogether, and for

[1] Grants, applications, and official notifications, under the Spanish Government, were drawn on a stamped paper known as Custom House paper.

the moment appeared to be upheld by a religious enthusiasm,—a joint confession of faith that meant death, destruction, and possibly forgery, as against the men who thought otherwise.

This spiritual harmony did away with all practical consideration and doubt. "I have a little niece," said Victor, "whose work with the pen is marvellous. If one says to her, 'Carmen, copy me this, or the other one,'—even if it be copper-plate,—look you it is done, and you cannot know of which is the original. *Madre de Dios!* the other day she makes me a rubric[1] of the Governor, Pio Pico, the same, identical. Thou knowest her, Miguel. She asked concerning thee yesterday."

With the embarrassment of an underbred man, Miguel tried to appear unconcerned, but failed dismally. Indeed, I fear that the black eyes of Carmen had already done their perfect and accepted work, and had partly induced the application for Victor's aid. He, however, dissembled so far as to ask:

"But will she not know?"

[1] The Spanish "*rubric*" is the complicated flourish attached to a signature, and is as individual and characteristic as the handwriting.

"She is a child."

"But will she not talk?"

"Not if I say nay, and if thou—eh, Miguel?"

This bit of flattery (which, by the way, was a lie, for Victor's niece did not incline favorably to Miguel, had its effect. They shook hands over the table. "But," said Miguel, "what is to be done must be done now." "At the moment," said Victor, "and thou shalt see it done. Eh? Does it content thee? then come!"

Miguel nodded to Manuel. "We will return in an hour; wait thou here."

They filed out into the dark, irregular street. Fate led them to pass the office of Dr. Guild at the moment that Concho mounted his horse. The shadows concealed them from their rival, but they overheard the last injunctions of the President to the unlucky Concho.

"Thou hearest?" said Miguel, clutching his companion's arm.

"Yes," said Victor. "But let him ride, my friend; in one hour we shall have that that shall arrive *years* before him," and with a complacent chuckle they passed unseen and unheard until, abruptly turning

a corner, they stopped before a low *adobe* house.

It had once been a somewhat pretentious dwelling, but had evidently followed the fortunes of its late owner, Don Juan Briones, who had offered it as a last sop to the three-headed Cerberus that guarded the *El Refugio* Plutonean treasures, and who had swallowed it in a single gulp. It was in very bad case. The furrows of its red-tiled roof looked as if they were the results of age and decrepitude. Its best room had a musty smell; there was the dampness of deliquescence in its slow decay, but the Spanish Californians were sensible architects, and its massive walls and partitions defied the earthquake thrill, and all the year round kept an even temperature within.

Victor led Miguel through a low anteroom into a plainly-furnished chamber, where Carmen sat painting.

Now Mistress Carmen was a bit of a painter, in a pretty little way, with all the vague longings of an artist, but without, I fear, the artist's steadfast soul. She recognized beauty and form as a child might, without understanding their meaning, and

somehow failed to make them even interpret her woman's moods, which surely were nature's too. So she painted everything with this innocent lust of the eye,—flowers, birds, insects, landscapes, and figures,—with a joyous fidelity, but no particular poetry. The bird never sang to her but one song, the flowers or trees spake but one language, and her skies never brightened except in color. She came out strong on the Catholic saints, and would toss you up a cleanly-shaven Aloysius, sweetly destitute of expression, or a dropsical, lethargic Madonna that you couldn't have told from an old master, so bad it was. Her faculty of faithful reproduction even showed itself in fanciful lettering,—and latterly in the imitation of fabrics and signatures. Indeed, with her eye for beauty of form, she had always excelled in penmanship at the Convent,—an accomplishment which the good sisters held in great repute.

In person she was *petite,* with a still unformed girlish figure, perhaps a little too flat across the back, and with possibly a too great tendency to a boyish stride in walking. Her brow, covered by blue-black

hair, was low and frank and honest; her eyes, a very dark hazel, were not particularly large, but rather heavily freighted in their melancholy lids with sleeping passion; her nose was of that unimportant character which no man remembers; her mouth was small and straight; her teeth, white and regular. The whole expression of her face was piquancy that might be subdued by tenderness or made malevolent by anger. At present it was a salad in which the oil and vinegar were deftly combined. The astute feminine reader will of course understand that this is the ordinary superficial masculine criticism, and at once make up her mind both as to the character of the young lady and the competency of the critic. I only know that *I* rather liked her. And her functions are somewhat important in this veracious history.

She looked up, started to her feet, leveled her black brows at the intruder, but, at a sign from her uncle, showed her white teeth and spake.

It was only a sentence, and a rather common-place one at that; but if she could have put her voice upon her canvas, she might have retrieved the Garcia fortunes.

For it was so musical, so tender, so sympathizing, so melodious, so replete with the graciousness of womanhood, that she seemed to have invented the language. And yet that sentence was only an exaggerated form of the 'How d' ye do,' whined out, doled out, lisped out, or shot out from the pretty mouths of my fair countrywomen.

Miguel admired the paintings. He was struck particularly with a crayon drawing of a mule. "Mother of God, it is the mule itself! observe how it will not go." Then the crafty Victor broke in with, "But it is nothing to her writing; look, you shall tell to me which is the handwriting of Pio Pico;" and, from a drawer in the secretary, he drew forth two signatures. One was affixed to a yellowish paper, the other drawn on plain white foolscap. Of course Miguel took the more modern one with lover-like gallantry. "It is this is genuine!" Victor laughed triumphantly; Carmen echoed the laugh melodiously in child-like glee, and added, with a slight toss of her piquant head, "It is mine!" The best of the sex will not refuse a just and overdue compliment from even the

man they dislike. It's the principle they're after, not the sentiment.

But Victor was not satisfied with this proof of his niece's skill. "Say to her," he demanded of Miguel, "what name thou likest, and it shall be done before thee here." Miguel was not so much in love but he perceived the drift of Victor's suggestion, and remarked that the rubric of Governor Micheltorena was exceedingly complicated and difficult. "She shall do it!" responded Victor, with decision.

From a file of old departmental papers the Governor's signature and that involved rubric, which must have cost his late Excellency many youthful days of anxiety, was produced and laid before Carmen.

Carmen took her pen in her hand, looked at the brownish-looking document, and then at the virgin whiteness of the foolscap before her. "But," she said, pouting prettily, "I should have to first paint this white paper brown. And it will absorb the ink more quickly than that. When I painted the *San Antonio* of the Mission San Gabriel for Father Acolti, I had to put the decay in with my oils and brushes before the good Padre would accept it."

The two scamps looked at each other. It was their supreme moment. "I think I have," said Victor, with assumed carelessness, "I think I have some of the old Custom-House paper." He produced from the secretary a sheet of brown paper with a stamp. "Try it on that."

Carmen smiled with childish delight, tried it, and produced a marvel! "It is as magic," said Miguel, feigning to cross himself.

Victor's *rôle* was more serious. He affected to be deeply touched, took the paper, folded it, and placed it in his breast. "I shall make a good fool of Don Jose Castro," he said; "he will declare it is the Governor's own signature, for he was his friend; but have a care, Carmen! that you spoil it not by the opening of your red lips. When he is fooled, I will tell him of this marvel,—this niece of mine, and he shall buy her pictures. Eh, little one?" and he gave her the avuncular caress, *i. e.*, a pat of the hand on either cheek, and a kiss. Miguel envied him, but cupidity outgeneraled Cupid, and presently the conversation flagged, until a convenient recollection of Victor's—that himself and

comrade were due at the *Posada del Toros* at 10 o'clock—gave them the opportunity to retire. But not without a chance shot from Carmen. "Tell to me," she said, half to Victor and half to Miguel, "what has chanced with Concho? He was ever ready to bring to me flowers from the mountain, and insects and birds. Thou knowest how he would sit, oh, my uncle, and talk to me of the rare rocks he had seen, and the bears and the evil spirits, and now he comes no longer, my Concho! How is this? Nothing evil has befallen him, surely?" and her drooping lids closed half-pathetically.

Miguel's jealousy took fire. "He is drunk, Señorita, doubtless, and has forgotten not only thee but, mayhap, his mule and pack! It is his custom, ha! ha!"

The red died out of Carmen's ripe lips, and she shut them together with a snap like a steel purse. The dove had suddenly changed to a hawk; the child-girl into an antique virago; the spirit hitherto dimly outlined in her face, of some shrewish Garcia ancestress, came to the fore. She darted a quick look at her uncle, and then, with her little hands on her rigid lips, strode with two steps up to Miguel.

"Possibly, O Señor Miguel Dominguez Perez (a profound courtesy here), it is as thou sayest. Drunkard Concho may be; but, drunk or sober, he never turned his back on his friend—or—(the words grated a little here)—his enemy."

Miguel would have replied, but Victor was ready. "Fool," he said, pinching his arm, "'tis an old friend. And—and—the application is still to be filled up. Are you crazy?"

But on this point Miguel was not, and with the revenge of a rival added to his other instincts, he permitted Victor to lead him away.

On their return to the *fonda,* they found Master Manuel too far gone with *aguardiente,* and a general animosity to the average *Americano,* to be of any service. So they worked alone, with pen, ink, and paper, in the stuffy, *cigarrito*-clouded back room of the *fonda.* It was midnight, two hours after Concho had started, that Miguel clapped spurs to his horse for the village of *Tres Pinos,* with an application to Governor Micheltorena for a grant to the "Rancho of the Red Rocks" comfortably bestowed in his pocket.

CHAPTER VII.

WHO PLEAD FOR IT.

THERE can be little doubt the coroner's jury of Fresno would have returned a verdict of "death from alcoholism," as the result of their inquest into the cause of Concho's death, had not Dr. Guild fought nobly in support of the law and his own convictions. A majority of the jury objected to there being any inquest at all. A sincere juryman thought it hard that whenever a Greaser pegged out in a sneakin' kind o' way, American citizens should be taken from their business to find out what ailed him. "S'pose he was killed," said another, "thar ain't no time this thirty year he weren't, so to speak, just sufferin' for it, ez his nat'ral right ez a Mexican." The jury at last compromised by bringing in a verdict of homicide against certain parties unknown. Yet

it was understood tacitly that these unknown parties were severally Wiles and Pedro; Manuel, Miguel, and Roscommon proving an unmistakable *alibi*. Wiles and Pedro had fled to Lower California, and Manuel, Miguel, and Roscommon deemed it advisable, in the then excited state of the public mind, to withhold the forged application and claim from the courts and the public comment. So that for a year after the murder of Concho and the flight of his assassins "The Blue Mass Mining Company" remained in undisturbed and actual possession of the mine, and reigned in their stead.

But the spirit of the murdered Concho would not down any more than that of the murdered Banquo, and so wrought, no doubt, in a quiet, Concho-like way, sore trouble with the "Blue Mass Company." For a great Capitalist and Master of Avarice came down to the mine and found it fair, and taking one of the Company aside, offered to lend his name and a certain amount of coin for a controlling interest, accompanying the generous offer with a suggestion that if it were not acceded to he would be compelled to buy up

various Mexican mines and flood the market with quicksilver to the great detriment of the "Blue Mass Company," which thoughtful suggestion, offered by a man frequently alluded to as one of "California's great mining princes," and as one who had "done much to develop the resources of the State," was not to be lightly considered; and so, after a cautious non-consultation with the Company, and a commendable secrecy, the stockholder sold out. Whereat it was speedily spread abroad that the great Capitalist had taken hold of "Blue Mass," and the stock went up, and the other stockholders rejoiced—until the great Capitalist found that it was necessary to put up expensive mills, to employ a high salaried Superintendent, in fact, to develop the mine by the spending of its earnings, so that the stock quoted at 112 was finally saddled with an assessment of $50 per share. Another assessment of $50 to enable the Superintendent to proceed to Russia and Spain and examine into the workings of the quicksilver mines there, and also a general commission to the gifted and scientific Pillageman to examine into the various

component parts of quicksilver, and report if it could not be manufactured from ordinary sand-stone by steam or electricity, speedily brought the other stockholders to their senses. It was at this time the good fellow "Tom," the serious-minded "Dick," and the speculative but fortunate "Harry," brokers of the Great Capitalist, found it convenient to buy up, for the Great Capitalist aforesaid, the various other shares at great sacrifice.

I fear that I have bored my readers in thus giving the tiresome details of that ingenuous American pastime which my countrymen dismiss in their epigrammatic way as the "freezing-out process." And lest any reader should question the ethics of the proceeding, I beg him to remember that one gentleman accomplished in this art was always a sincere and direct opponent of the late Mr. John Oakhurst, gambler.

But for once the Great Master of Avarice had not taken into sufficient account the avarice of others, and was suddenly and virtuously shocked to learn that an application for a patent for certain lands, known as the "Red-Rock Rancho," was about to be offered before the United

States Land Commission. This claim covered his mining property. But the information came quietly and secretly, as all of the Great Master's information was obtained, and he took the opportunity to sell out his clouded title and his proprietorship to the only remaining member of the original "Blue Mass Company," a young fellow of pith, before many-tongued rumor had voiced the news far and wide. The blow was a heavy one to the party left in possession. Saddled by the enormous debts and expenses of the Great Capitalist, with a credit now further injured by the defection of this lucky magnate, who was admired for his skill in anticipating a loss, and whose relinquishment of any project meant ruin to it, the single-handed, impoverished possessor of the mine, whose title was contested, and whose reputation was yet to be made,—poor Biggs, first secretary and only remaining officer of the "Blue Mass Company," looked ruefully over his books and his last transfer, and sighed. But I have before intimated that he was built of good stuff, and that he believed in his work,—which was well,—and in himself, which was better; and so,

having faith even as a grain of mustard seed, I doubt not he would have been able to remove that mountain of quicksilver beyond the overlapping of fraudulent grants. And, again, Providence—having disposed of these several scamps—raised up to him a friend. But that friend is of sufficient importance to this veracious history to deserve a paragraph to himself.

The Pylades of this Orestes was known of ordinary mortals as Royal Thatcher. His genealogy, birth, and education are, I take it, of little account to this chronicle, which is only concerned with his friendship for Biggs and the result thereof. He had known Biggs a year or two previously; they had shared each other's purses, bunks, cabins, provisions, and often friends, with that perfect freedom from obligation which belonged to the pioneer life. The varying tide of fortune had just then stranded Thatcher on a desert sand hill in San Francisco, with an uninsured cargo of Expectations, while to Thatcher's active but not curious fancy it had apparently lifted his friend's bark over the bar in the Monterey mountains into an open quicksilver sea. So that he was con-

siderably surprised on receiving a note from Biggs to this purport:

"DEAR ROY—Run down here and help a fellow. I've too much of a load for one. Maybe we can make a team and pull 'Blue Mass' out yet. BIGGSEY."

Thatcher, sitting in his scantily furnished lodgings, doubtful of his next meal and in arrears for rent, heard this Macedonian cry as St. Paul did. He wrote a promissory and soothing note to his landlady, but fearing the "sweet sorrow" of personal parting, let his collapsed valise down from his window by a cord, and, by means of an economical combination of stage riding and pedestrianism, he presented himself, at the close of the third day, at Biggs's door. In a few moments he was in possession of the story; half an hour later in possession of half the mine, its infelix past and its doubtful future, equally with his friend.

Business over, Biggs turned to look at his partner. "You've aged some since I saw you last," he said. "Starvation luck, I s'pose. I'd know your eyes, old fellow, if I saw them among ten thousand; but your lips are parched, and your mouth's grimmer than it used to be." Thatcher

smiled to show that he could still do so, but did not say, as he might have said, that self-control, suppressed resentment, disappointment, and occasional hunger had done something in the way of correcting Nature's obvious mistakes, and shutting up a kindly mouth. He only took off his threadbare coat, rolled up his sleeves, and saying, "We've got lots of work and some fighting before us," pitched into the "affairs" of the "Blue Mass Company" on the instant.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF COUNSEL FOR IT.

Meanwhile Roscommon had waited. Then, in Garcia's name, and backed by him, he laid his case before the Land Commissioner, filing the application (with forged indorsements) to Governor Micheltorena, and alleging that the original grant was destroyed by fire. And why?

It seemed there was a limit to Miss Carmen's imitative talent. Admirable as it was, it did not reach to the reproduction of that official seal, which would have been a necessary appendage to the Governor's grant. But there were letters written on stamped paper by Governor Micheltorena to himself, Garcia, and to Miguel, and to Manuel's father, all of which were duly signed by the sign manual and rubric of Mrs.-Governor-Micheltorena-Carmen-de-Haro. And then there was "parol" evi-

dence, and plenty of it; witnesses who remembered everything about it,—namely, Manuel, Miguel, and the all-recollecting De Haro; here were details, poetical and suggestive; and Dame-Quicklyish, as when his late Excellency, sitting not "by a sea-coal fire," but with *aguardiente* and *cigarros,* had sworn to him, the ex-ecclesiastic Miguel, that he should grant, and had granted, Garcia's request. There were clouds of witnesses, conversations, letters, and records, glib and pat to the occasion. In brief, there was nothing wanted but the seal of his Excellency. The only copy of that was in the possession of a rival school of renaissant art and the restoration of antiques, then doing business before the Land Commission.

And yet the claim was rejected! Having lately recommended two separate claimants to a patent for the same land, the Land Commission became cautious and conservative.

Roscommon was at first astounded, then indignant, and then warlike,—he was for an "appale to onst!"

With the reader's previous knowledge of Roscommon's disposition this may seem

somewhat inconsistent; but there are certain natures to whom litigation has all the excitement of gambling, and it should be borne in mind that this was his first lawsuit. So that his lawyer, Mr. Saponaceous Wood, found him in that belligerent mood to which counsel are obliged to hypocritically bring all the sophistries of their profession.

"Of course you have your right to an appeal, but calm yourself, my dear sir, and consider. The case was presented strongly, the evidence overwhelming on our side, but we happened to be fighting *previous decisions of the Land Commission that had brought them into trouble;* so that if Micheltorena had himself appeared in Court and testified to his giving you the grant, it would have made no difference,—no Spanish grant had a show then, nor will it have for the next six months. You see, my dear sir, the Government sent out one of its big Washington lawyers to look into this business, and he reported frauds, sir, frauds, in a majority of the Spanish claims. And why, sir? why? He was bought, sir, bought—body and soul—by the Ring!"

"And fwhot's the Ring?" asked his client sharply.

"The Ring is—ahem! a combination of unprincipled but wealthy persons to defeat the ends of justice."

"And sure, fwhot's the Ring to do wid me grant as that thaving Mexican gave me as the collatherals for the bourd he was owin' me? Eh, mind that now!"

"The Ring, my dear sir, is the other side. It is—ahem! always the Other Side."

"And why the divel haven't we a Ring too? And ain't I payin' ye five hundred dollars,—and the divel of Ring ye have, at all, at all? Fwhot am I payin' ye fur, eh?"

"That a judicious expenditure of money," began Mr. Wood, "outside of actual disbursements, may not be of infinite service to you I am not prepared to deny,—but—"

"Look ye, Mr. Sappy Wood, it's the 'appale' I want, and the grant I'll have, more betoken as the old woman's har-rut and me own is set on it entoirely. Get me the land and I'll give ye the half of it,—and it's a bargain!"

"But my dear sir, there are some rules in our profession,—technical though they may be—"

"The divel fly away wid yer profession. Sure is it better nor me own? If I've risked me provisions and me whisky, that cost me solid goold in Frisco, on that thafe Garcia's claim, bedad! the loikes of ye can risk yer law."

"Well," said Wood, with an awkward smile, "I suppose that a deed for one half, on the consideration of friendship, my dear sir, and a dollar in hand paid by me, might be reconcilable."

"Now it's talkin' ye are. But who's the felly we're foighten, that's got the Ring?"

"Ah, my dear sir, it's the United States," said the lawyer with gravity.

"The States! the Government is it? And is't that ye're afeared of? Sure it's the Government that I fought in me own counthree, it was the Government that druv me to Ameriky, and is it now that I'm going back on me principles?"

"Your political sentiments do you great credit," began Mr. Wood.

"But fwhot's the Government to do wid the appale?"

"The Government," said Mr. Wood significantly, "will be represented by the District Attorney."

"And who's the spalpeen?"

"It is rumored," said Mr. Wood, slowly, "that a new one is to be appointed. *I*, myself, have had some ambition that way."

His client bent a pair of cunning but not over-wise grey eyes on his American lawyer. But he only said, "Ye have, eh?"

"Yes," said Wood, answering the look boldly; "and if I had the support of a number of your prominent countrymen, who are so powerful with *all* parties,—men like *you*, my dear sir,—why, I think you might in time become a conservative, at least more resigned to the Government."

Then the lesser and the greater scamp looked at each other, and for a moment or two felt a warm, sympathetic, friendly emotion for each other, and quietly shook hands.

Depend upon it there is a great deal more kindly human sympathy between two openly-confessed scamps than there is in that calm, respectable recognition that

you and I, dear reader, exhibit when we happen to oppose each other with our respective virtues.

"And ye'll get the appale?"

"I will."

And he DID! And by a singular coincidence got the District Attorneyship also. And with a deed for one half of the "Red-Rock Rancho" in his pocket, sent a brother lawyer in court to appear for his client, the United States, as against *himself,* Roscommon, Garcia, *et al.* Wild horses could not have torn him from this noble resolution. There is an indescribable delicacy in the legal profession which we literary folk ought to imitate.

The United States lost! Which meant ruin and destruction to the "Blue Mass Company," who had bought from a paternal and beneficent Government lands which didn't belong to it. The Mexican grant, of course, antedated the occupation of the mine by Concho, Wiles, Pedro, *et al.,* as well as by the "Blue Mass Company," and the solitary partners, Biggs and Thatcher. More than that, it swallowed up their improvements. It made Biggs and Thatcher responsible to Garcia for all the money the

Grand Master of Avarice had made out of it. Mr. District Attorney was apparently distressed, but resigned. Messrs. Biggs and Thatcher were really distressed and combative.

And then, to advance a few years in this chronicle, began real litigation with earnestness, vigor, courage, zeal, and belief on the part of Biggs and Thatcher, and technicalities, delay, equivocation, and a general Fabian-like policy on the part of Garcia, Roscommon, *et al.* Of all these tedious processes I note but one, which for originality and audacity of conception appears to me to indicate more clearly the temper and civilization of the epoch. A subordinate officer of the District Court refused to obey the mandate ordering a transcript of the record to be sent up to the United States Supreme Court. It is to be regretted that the name of this Ephesian youth, who thus fired the dome of our constitutional liberties, should have been otherwise so unimportant as to be confined to the dusty records of that doubtful court of which he was a doubtful servitor, and that his claim to immortality ceased with his double-feed service. But

there still stands on record a letter by this young gentleman, arraigning the legal wisdom of the land, which is not entirely devoid of amusement or even instruction to young men desirous of obtaining publicity and capital. Howbeit, the Supreme Court was obliged to protect itself by procuring the legislation of his functions out of his local fingers into the larger palm of its own attorney.

These various processes of law and equity, which, when exercised practically in the affairs of ordinary business, might have occupied a few months' time, dragged, clung, retrograded, or advanced slowly during a period of eight or nine years. But the strong arms of Biggs and Thatcher held POSSESSION, and possibly, by the same tactics employed on the other side, arrested or delayed ejectment, and so made and sold quicksilver, while their opponents were spending gold, until Biggs, sorely hit in the interlacings of his armor, fell in the lists, his cheek growing waxen and his strong arm feeble, and finding himself in this sore condition, and passing, as it were, made over his share in trust to his comrade, and died. Whereat, from that time hence-

forward, Royal Thatcher reigned in his stead.

And so, having anticipated the legal record, we will go back to the various human interests that helped to make it up.

To begin with Roscommon: To do justice to his later conduct and expressions, it must be remembered that when he accepted the claim for the "Red-Rock Rancho," yet unquestioned, from the hands of Garcia, he was careless, or at least unsuspicious of fraud. It was not until he had experienced the intoxication of litigation that he felt, somehow, that he was a wronged and defrauded man, but with the obstinacy of defrauded men, preferred to arraign some one fact or individual as the impelling cause of his wrong, rather than the various circumstances that led to it. To his simple mind it was made patent that the "Blue Mass Company" were making money out of a mine which he claimed, and which was not yet adjudged to them. Every dollar they took out was a fresh count in this general indictment. Every delay towards this adjustment of rights—although made by his own lawyer—was a personal wrong. The mere fact that there

never was nor had been any *quid pro quo* for this immense property—that it had fallen to him for a mere song—only added zest to his struggle. The possibility of his losing this mere speculation affected him more strongly than if he had already paid down the million he expected to get from the mine. I don't know that I have indicated as plainly as I might that universal preference on the part of mankind to get something from nothing, and to acquire the largest return for the least possible expenditure, but I question my right to say that Roscommon was much more reprehensible than his fellows.

But it told upon him as it did upon all over whom the spirit of the murdered Concho brooded,—upon all whom avarice alternately flattered and tortured. From his quiet gains in his legitimate business, from the little capital accumulated through industry and economy, he lavished thousands on this chimera of his fancy. He grew grizzled and worn over his self-imposed delusion; he no longer jested with his customers, regardless of quality or station or importance; he had cliques to mollify, enemies to placate, friends to reward. The

grocery suffered; through giving food and lodgment to clouds of unimpeachable witnesses before the Land Commission and the District Court, "Mrs. Ros." found herself losing money. Even the bar failed; there was a party of "Blue Mass" employes who drank at the opposite *fonda,* and cursed the Roscommon claim over the liquor. The calm, mechanical indifference with which Roscommon had served his customers was gone. The towel was no longer used after its perfunctory fashion; the counter remained unwiped; the disks of countless glasses marked its surface, and indicated other preoccupation on the part of the proprietor. The keen grey eyes of the claimant of the "Red-Rock Rancho" were always on the lookout for friend or enemy.

Garcia comes next. That gentleman's inborn talent for historic misrepresentation culminated unpleasantly through a defective memory; a year or two after he had sworn in his application for the "Rancho," being engaged in another case, some trifling inconsistency was discovered in his statements, which had the effect of throwing the weight of evidence to the party who

had paid him most, but was instantly detected by the weaker party. Garcia's pre-eminence as a witness, an expert and general historian began to decline. He was obliged to be corroborated, and this required a liberal outlay of his fee. With the loss of his credibility as a witness bad habits supervened. He was frequently drunk, he lost his position, he lost his house, and Carmen, removed to San Francisco, supported him with her brush.

And this brings us once more to that pretty painter and innocent forger whose unconscious act bore such baleful fruit on the barren hill-sides of the "Red-Rock Rancho," and also to a later blossom of her life, that opened, however, in kindlier sunshine.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT THE FAIR HAD TO DO ABOUT IT.

The house that Royal Thatcher so informally quitted in his exodus to the promised land of Biggs was one of those oversized, under-calculated dwellings conceived and erected in the extravagance of the San Francisco builder's hopes, and occupied finally in his despair. Intended originally as the palace of some inchoate California Aladdin, it usually ended as a lodging house in which some helpless widow or hopeless spinster managed to combine respectability with the hard task of bread getting.

Thatcher's landlady was one of the former class. She had unfortunately survived not only her husband but his property, and, living in some deserted chamber, had, after the fashion of the Italian nobility, let out the rest of the ruin.

A tendency to dwell upon these facts gave her conversation a peculiar significance on the first of each month. Thatcher had noticed this with the sensitiveness of an impoverished gentleman. But when, a few days after her lodger's sudden disappearance, a note came from him containing a draft in noble excess of all arrears and charges, the widow's heart was lifted, and the rock smitten with the golden wand gushed beneficence that shone in a new gown for the widow and a new suit for "Johnny," her son, a new oil cloth in the hall, better service to the lodgers, and, let us be thankful, a kindlier consideration for the poor little black-eyed painter from Monterey, then dreadfully behind in her room rent. For, to tell the truth, the calls upon Miss De Haro's scant purse by her uncle had lately been frequent, perjury having declined in the Monterey market, through excessive and injudicious supply, until the line of demarcation between it and absolute verity was so finely drawn that Victor Garcia had remarked that "he might as well tell the truth at once and save his soul, since the devil was in the market."

Mistress Plodgitt, the landlady, could not resist the desire to acquaint Carmen De Haro with her good fortune. "He was always a friend of yours, my dear,—and I know him to be a gentleman that would never let a poor widow suffer; and see what he says about you!" Here she produced Thatcher's note and read: "Tell my little neighbor that I shall come back soon to carry her and her sketching tools off by force, and I shall not let her return until she has caught the black mountains and the red rocks she used to talk about, and put the 'Blue Mass' mill in the foreground of the picture I shall order."

What is this, little one? Surely, Carmen, thou needst not blush at this, thy first grand offer. Holy Virgin! is it of a necessity that thou shouldst stick the wrong end of thy brush in thy mouth, and then drop it in thy lap? Or was it taught thee by the good Sisters at the convent to stride in that boyish fashion to the side of thy elders and snatch from their hands the missive thou wouldst read? More of this we would know, O Carmen,—smallest of brunettes,—speak, little one, even in thine own melodious speech, that I may com-

mend thee and thy rare discretion to my own fair countrywomen.

Alas, neither the present chronicler nor Mistress Plodgitt got any further information from the prudent Carmen, and must fain speculate upon certain facts that were already known.

Mistress Carmen's little room was opposite to Thatcher's, and once or twice, the doors being open, Thatcher had a glimpse across the passage of a black-haired and a sturdy, boyish little figure in a great blue apron, perched on a stool before an easel, and on the other hand, Carmen had often been conscious of the fumes of a tobacco pipe penetrating her cloistered seclusion, and had seen across the passage, vaguely enveloped in the same nicotine cloud, an American Olympian, in a rocking chair, with his feet on the mantel shelf. They had once or twice met on the staircase, on which occasion Thatcher had greeted her with a word or two of respectful yet half-humorous courtesy,—a courtesy which never really offends a true woman, although it often piques her self-aplomb by the slight assumption of superiority in the humorist. A woman is quick to recognize

the fact that the great and more dangerous passions are always *serious,* and may be excused if in self-respect she is often induced to try if there be not somewhere under the skin of this laughing Mercutio the flesh and blood of a Romeo. Thatcher was by nature a defender and protector; weakness, and weakness alone, stirred the depths of his tenderness,—often, I fear, only through its half-humorous aspects,—and on this plane he was pleased to place women and children. I mention this fact for the benefit of the more youthful members of my species, and am satisfied that an unconditional surrender and the complete laying down at the feet of Beauty of all strong masculinity is a cheap Gallicism that is untranslatable to most women worthy the winning. For a woman *must* always look up to the man she truly loves,—even if she has to go down on her knees to do it.

Only the masculine reader will infer from this that Carmen was in love with Thatcher; the more critical and analytical feminine eye will see nothing herein that might not have happened consistently with friendship. For Thatcher was no senti-

mentalist; he had hardly paid a compliment to the girl,—even in the unspoken but most delicate form of attention. There were days when his room door was closed; there were days succeeding these blanks when he met her as frankly and naturally as if he had seen her yesterday. Indeed, on those days following his flight the simple-minded Carmen, being aware—heaven knows how—that he had not opened his door during that period, and fearing sickness, sudden death, or perhaps suicide, by her appeals to the landlady, assisted unwittingly in discovering his flight and defection. As she was for a few moments as indignant as Mrs. Plodgitt, it is evident that she had but little sympathy with the delinquent. And besides, hitherto she had known only Concho, her earliest friend, and was true to his memory, as against all *Americanos,* whom she firmly believed to be his murderers.

So she dismissed the offer and the man from her mind, and went back to her painting,—a fancy portrait of the good Padre Junipero Serra, a great missionary, who, haply for the integrity of his bones and character, died some hundred years before

the Americans took possession of California. The picture was fair but unsaleable, and she began to think seriously of sign painting, which was then much more popular and marketable. An unfinished head of *San Juan de Bautista,* artificially framed in clouds, she disposed of to a prominent druggist for $50, where it did good service as exhibiting the effect of four bottles of "Jones's Freckle Eradicator," and in a pleasant and unobtrusive way revived the memory of the saint. Still, she felt weary and was growing despondent, and had a longing for the good Sisters and the blameless lethargy of conventual life, and then——

He came!

But not as the Prince should come, on a white charger, to carry away this cruelly-abused and enchanted damsel. He was sunburned, he was bearded like "the pard"; he was a little careless as to his dress, and pre-occupied in his ways. But his mouth and eyes were the same; and when he repeated in his old frank, half-mischievous way the invitation of his letter, poor little Carmen could only hesitate and blush.

A thought struck him and sent the color

to his face. Your gentleman born is always as modest as a woman. He ran down stairs, and seizing the widowed Plodgitt, said hastily:

"You're just killing yourself here. Take a change. Come down to Monterey for a day or two with me, and bring Miss De Haro with you for company."

The old lady recognized the situation. Thatcher was now a man of vast possibilities. In all maternal daughters of Eve there is the slightest bit of the chaperone and match-maker. It is the last way of reviving the past.

She consented, and Carmen De Haro could not well refuse.

The ladies found the "Blue Mass" mills very much as Thatcher had previously delivered it to them, "a trifle rough and mannish." But he made over to them the one tenement reserved for himself, and slept with his men, or more likely under the trees. At first Mrs. Plodgitt missed gas and running water, and these several conveniences of civilization, among which I fear may be mentioned sheets and pillow cases; but the balsam of the mountain air soothed her neuralgia and her temper. As

for Carmen, she rioted in the unlimited license of her absolute freedom from conventional restraint and the indulgence of her child-like impulses. She scoured the ledges far and wide alone; she dipped into dark copses, and scrambled over sterile patches of *chemisal,* and came back laden with the spoil of buckeye blossoms, *manzanita* berries and laurel. But she would not make a sketch of the "Blue Mass Company's" mills on a Mercator's projection—something that could be afterwards lithographed or chromoed, with the mills turning out tons of quicksilver through the energies of a happy and picturesque assemblage of miners—even to please her *padrone,* Don Royal Thatcher. On the contrary, she made a study of the ruins of the crumbled and decayed red-rock furnace, with the black mountain above it, and the light of a dying camp fire shining upon it, and the dull-red excavations in the ledge. But even this did not satisfy her until she had made some alterations; and when she finally brought her finished study to Don Royal, she looked at him a little defiantly. Thatcher admired honestly, and then criticised a little humorously and dishonestly.

"But couldn't you, for a consideration, put up a sign-board on that rock with the inscription, 'Road to the Blue Mass Company's new mills to the right,' and combine business with art? That's the fault of you geniuses. But what's this blanketed figure doing here, lying before the furnace? You never saw one of my miners there,—and a Mexican, too, by his *serape.*" "That," quoth Mistress Carmen, coolly, "was put in to fill up the foreground,—I wanted something there to balance the picture." "But," continued Thatcher, dropping into unconscious admiration again, "it's drawn to the life. Tell me, Miss De Haro, before I ask the aid and counsel of Mrs. Plodgitt, who is my hated rival, and your lay figure and model?" "Oh," said Carmen, with a little sigh, "It's only poor Concho." "And where is Concho?" (a little impatiently.) "He's dead, Don Royal." "Dead?" "Of a verity,—very dead,—murdered by your countrymen." "I see,—and you know him?" "He was my friend."

"Oh!"

"Truly."

"But" (wickedly), "isn't this a rather

ghastly advertisement—outside of an illustrated newspaper—of my property?"

"Ghastly, Don Royal. Look you, he sleeps."

"Ay" (in Spanish), "as the dead."

Carmen (crossing herself hastily), "After the fashion of the dead."

They were both feeling uncomfortable. Carmen was shivering. But, being a woman, and tactful, she recovered her head first. "It is a study for myself, Don Royal; I shall make you another."

And she slipped away, as she thought, out of the subject and his presence.

But she was mistaken; in the evening he renewed the conversation. Carmen began to fence, not from cowardice or deceit, as the masculine reader would readily infer, but from some wonderful feminine instinct that told her to be cautious. But he got from her the fact, to him before unknown, that she was the niece of his main antagonist, and, being a gentleman, so redoubled his attentions and his courtesy that Mrs. Plodgitt made up her mind that it was a foregone conclusion, and seriously reflected as to what she should wear on the momentous occasion. But that night poor

Carmen cried herself to sleep, resolving that she would hereafter cast aside her wicked uncle for this good-hearted *Americano,* yet never once connected her innocent penmanship with the deadly feud between them. Women—the best of them—are strong as to collateral facts, swift of deduction, but vague as children are to the exact statement or recognition of premises. It is hardly necessary to say that Carmen had never thought of connecting any act of hers with the claims of her uncle, and the circumstance of the signature she had totally forgotten.

The masculine reader will now understand Carmen's confusion and blushes, and believe himself an ass to have thought them a confession of original affection. The feminine reader will, by this time, become satisfied that the deceitful minx's sole idea was to gain the affections of Thatcher. And really I don't know who is right.

Nevertheless she painted a sketch of Thatcher,—which now adorns the Company's office in San Francisco,—in which the property is laid out in pleasing geometrical lines, and the rosy promise of the future instinct in every touch of the brush.

Then, having earned her "wage," as she believed, she became somewhat cold and shy to Thatcher. Whereat that gentleman redoubled his attentions, seeing only in her presence a certain *meprise*, which concerned her more than himself. The niece of his enemy meant nothing more to him than an interesting girl,—to be protected always,—to be feared, never. But even suspicion may be insidiously placed in noble minds.

Mistress Plodgitt, thus early estopped of matchmaking, of course put the blame on her own sex, and went over to the stronger side—the man's.

"It's a great pity gals should be so curious," she said, *sotto voce,* to Thatcher, when Carmen was in one of her sullen moods. "Yet I s'pose it's in her blood. Them Spaniards is always revengeful,—like the Eyetalians."

Thatcher honestly looked his surprise.

"Why, don't you see, she's thinking how all these lands might have been her uncle's but for you. And instead of trying to be sweet and—" here she stopped to cough.

"Good God!" said Thatcher in great concern, "I never thought of that." He

stopped for a moment, and then added with decision, "I can't believe it; it isn't like her."

Mrs. P. was piqued. She walked away, delivering, however, this Parthian arrow: "Well, I hope *'taint nothing worse.*"

Thatcher chuckled, then felt uneasy. When he next met Carmen, she found his grey eyes fixed on hers with a curious, half-inquisitorial look she had never noticed before. This only added fuel to the fire. Forgetting their relations of host and guest, she was absolutely rude. Thatcher was quiet but watchful; got the Plodgitt to bed early, and, under cover of showing a moonlight view of the "Lost Chance Mill," decoyed Carmen out of ear-shot, as far as the dismantled furnace.

"What is the matter, Miss De Haro; have I offended you?"

Miss Carmen was not aware that anything was the matter. If Don Royal preferred old friends, whose loyalty of course he knew, *and who were above speaking ill against a gentleman in his adversity*—(oh, Carmen! fie!) if he preferred *their* company to *later friends*—why—(the masculine reader will observe this tremendous

climax and tremble)—why she didn't know why *he* should blame *her*.

They turned and faced each other. The conditions for a perfect misunderstanding could not have been better arranged between two people. Thatcher was a masculine reasoner, Carmen a feminine feeler,—if I may be pardoned the expression. Thatcher wanted to get at certain facts, and argue therefrom. Carmen wanted to get at certain feelings, and then fit the facts to *them*.

"But I am *not* blaming you, Miss Carmen," he said gravely. "It *was* stupid in me to confront you here with the property claimed by your uncle and occupied by me, but it was a mistake,—no!" he added hastily, "it was not a mistake. You knew it, and I didn't. You overlooked it before you came, and I was too glad to overlook it after you were here."

"Of course," said Carmen pettishly, "I am the only one to be blamed. It's like you *men!*" (Mem. She was just fifteen, and uttered this awful *résumé* of experience just as if it hadn't been taught to her in her cradle.)

Feminine generalities always stagger a

man. Thatcher said nothing. Carmen became more enraged.

"Why did you want to take Uncle Victor's property, then?" she asked triumphantly.

"I don't know that it is your uncle's property."

"You—don't—know? Have you seen the application with Governor Micheltorena's indorsement? Have you heard the witnesses?" she said passionately.

"Signatures may be forged and witnesses lie," said Thatcher quietly.

"What is it you call 'forged'?"

Thatcher instantly recalled the fact that the Spanish language held no synonym for "forgery." The act was apparently an invention of *el Diablo Americano.* So he said, with a slight smile in his kindly eyes:

"Anybody wicked enough and dexterous enough can imitate another's handwriting. When this is used to benefit fraud, we call it 'forgery.' I beg your pardon,—Miss De Haro, Miss Carmen,—what is the matter?"

She had suddenly lapsed against a tree, quite helpless, nerveless, and with staring

eyes fixed on his. As yet an embryo woman, inexperienced and ignorant, the sex's instinct was potential; she had in one plunge fathomed all that his reason had been years groping for.

Thatcher saw only that she was pained, that she was helpless: that was enough. "It is possible that your uncle may have been deceived," he began; "many honest men have been fooled by clever but deceitful tricksters, men and women—"

"Stop! *Madre de Dios!* WILL YOU STOP?"

Thatcher for an instant recoiled from the flashing eyes and white face of the little figure that had, with menacing and clenched baby fingers, strode to his side. He stopped. "Where is this application, —this forgery?" she asked. "Show it to me!"

Thatcher felt relieved, and smiled the superior smile of our sex over feminine ignorance. "You could hardly expect me to be trusted with your uncle's vouchers. His papers of course are in the hands of his counsel."

"And when can I leave this place?" she asked passionately.

"If you consult my wishes you will stay, if only long enough to forgive me. But if I have offended you unknowingly, and you are implacable—"

"I can go to-morrow at sunrise if I like?"

"As you will," returned Thatcher gravely.

"Gracias, Señor."

They walked slowly back to the house, Thatcher with a masculine sense of being unreasonably afflicted, Carmen with a woman's instinct of being hopelessly crushed. No word was spoken until they reached the door. Then Carmen suddenly, in her old, impulsive way, and in a child-like treble, sang out merrily, "Good night, O Don Royal, and pleasant dreams. *Hasta mañana.*"

Thatcher stood dumb and astounded at this capricious girl. She saw his mystification instantly. "It is for the old Cat!" she whispered, jerking her thumb over her shoulder in the direction of the sleeping Mrs. P. "Good night,—go!"

He went to give orders for a *peon* to attend the ladies and their equipage the next day. He awoke to find Miss De Haro

gone, with her escort, towards Monterey. And without the Plodgitt.

He could not conceal his surprise from the latter lady. She, left alone,—a not altogether unavailable victim to the wiles of our sex,—was embarrassed. But not so much that she could not say to Thatcher: "I told you so,—gone to her uncle. . . . To tell him *all!*"

"All. D—n it, *what* can she tell him?" roared Thatcher, stung out of his self-control.

"Nothing, I hope, that she should not," said Mrs. P., and chastely retired.

She was right. Miss Carmen posted to Monterey, running her horse nearly off its legs to do it, and then sent back her beast and escort, saying she would rejoin Mrs. Plodgitt by steamer at San Francisco. Then she went boldly to the law office of Saponaceous Wood, District Attorney and whilom solicitor of her uncle.

With the majority of masculine Monterey Miss Carmen was known and respectfully admired, despite the infelix reputation of her kinsman. Mr. Wood was glad to see her, and awkwardly gallant. Miss Carmen was cool and business-like; she

had come from her uncle to "regard" the papers in the "Red-Rock Rancho" case. They were instantly produced. Carmen turned to the application for the grant. Her cheek paled slightly. With her clear memory and wonderful fidelity of perception she could not be mistaken. *The signature of Micheltorena was in her own handwriting!"*

Yet she looked up to the lawyer with a smile: "May I take these papers for an hour to my uncle?"

Even an older and better man than the District Attorney could not have resisted those drooping lids and that gentle voice.

"Certainly."

"I will return them in an hour."

She was as good as her word, and within the hour dropped the papers and a little courtesy to her uncle's legal advocate, and that night took the steamer to San Francisco.

The next morning Victor Garcia, a little the worse for the previous night's dissipation, reeled into Wood's office. "I have fears for my niece Carmen. She is with the enemy," he said thickly. "Look you at this."

It was an anonymous letter (in Mrs. Plodgitt's own awkward fist) advising him of the fact that his niece was bought by the enemy, and cautioning him against her.

"Impossible," said the lawyer; "it was only last week she sent thee $50."

Victor blushed, even through his ensanguined cheeks, and made an impatient gesture with his hand.

"Besides," added the lawyer coolly, "she has been here to examine the papers at thy request, and returned them of yesterday."

Victor gasped: "And-you-you-gave them to her?"

"Of course!"

"All? Even the application and the signature?"

"Certainly,—you sent her."

"Sent her? The devil's own daughter?" shrieked Garcia. "No! A hundred million times, no! Quick, before it is too late. Give to me the papers."

Mr. Wood reproduced the file. Garcia ran over it with trembling fingers until at last he clutched the fateful document. Not content with opening it and glancing

at its text and signature, he took it to the window.

"It is the same," he muttered with a sigh of relief.

"Of course it is," said Mr. Wood sharply. "The papers are all there. You're a fool, Victor Garcia!"

And so he was. And, for the matter of that, so was Mr. Sponaceous Wood, of counsel.

Meanwhile Miss De Haro returned to San Francisco and resumed her work. A day or two later she was joined by her landlady. Mrs. P. had too large a nature to permit an anonymous letter, written by her own hand, to stand between her and her demeanor to her little lodger. So she coddled her and flattered her and depicted in slightly exaggerated colors the grief of Don Royal at her sudden departure. All of which Miss Carmen received in a demure, kitten-like way, but still kept quietly at her work. In due time Don Royal's order was completed; still she had leisure and inclination enough to add certain touches to her ghastly sketch of the crumbling furnace.

Nevertheless, as Don Royal did not re-

turn, through excess of business, Mrs. Plodgitt turned an honest penny by letting his room, temporarily, to two quiet Mexicans, who, but for a beastly habit of *cigarrito* smoking which tainted the whole house, were fair enough lodgers. If they failed in making the acquaintance of their fair countrywoman, Miss De Haro, it was through the lady's pre-occupation in her own work, and not through their ostentatious endeavors.

"Miss De Haro is peculiar," explained the politic Mrs. Plodgitt to her guests; "she makes no acquaintances, which I consider bad for her business. If it had not been for me, she would not have known Royal Thatcher, the great quicksilver miner,—and had his order for a picture of his mine!"

The two foreign gentlemen exchanged glances. One said, "Ah, God! this is bad," and the other, "It is not possible;" and then, when the landlady's back was turned, introduced themselves with a skeleton key into the then vacant bedroom and studio of their fair countrywoman, who was absent sketching. "Thou observest," said Mr. Pedro, refugee, to Miguel, ex-

ecclesiastic, "that this *Americano* is all-powerful, and that this Victor, drunkard as he is, is right in his suspicions."

"Of a verity, yes," replied Miguel, "thou dost remember it was Jovita Castro who, for her *Americano* lover, betrayed the Sobriente claim. It is only with us, my Pedro, that the Mexican spirit, the real God and Liberty, yet lives!"

They shook hands nobly and with sentimental fervor, and then went to work, *i. e.,* the rummaging over the trunks, drawers, and portmanteaus of the poor little painter, Carmen de Haro, and even ripped up the mattress of her virginal cot. But they found not what they sought.

"What is that yonder on the easel, covered with a cloth?" said Miguel: "it is a trick of these artists to put their valuables together."

Pedro strode to the easel and tore away the muslin curtain that veiled it; then uttered a shriek that appalled his comrade and brought him to his side.

"In the name of God," said Miguel hastily, "are you trying to alarm the house?"

The ex-vaquero was trembling like a

child. "Look," he said hoarsely, "look, do you see? It is the hand of God," and fainted on the floor!

Miguel looked. It was Carmen's partly-finished sketch of the deserted furnace. The figure of Concho, thrown out strongly by the camp fire, occupied the left foreground. But to balance her picture she had evidently been obliged to introduce another,—the face and figure of Pedro, on all fours, creeping towards the sleeping man.

PART III.—IN CONGRESS.

CHAPTER X.

WHO LOBBIED FOR IT.

It was a midsummer's day in Washington. Even at early morning, while the sun was yet level with the faces of pedestrians in its broad, shadeless avenues, it was insufferably hot. Later the avenues themselves shone like the diverging rays of another sun,—the Capitol,—a thing to be feared by the naked eye. Later yet it grew hotter, and then a mist arose from the Potomac, and blotted out the blazing arch above, and presently piled up along the horizon delusive thunder clouds, that spent their strength and substance elsewhere, and left it hotter than before. Towards evening the sun came out invigorated, having cleared the heavenly brow of perspiration, but leaving its fever unabated.

The city was deserted. The few who remained apparently buried themselves from the garish light of day in some dim, cloistered recess of shop, hotel, or restaurant; and the perspiring stranger, dazed by the outer glare, who broke in upon their quiet, sequestered repose, confronted collarless and coatless specters of the past, with fans in their hands, who, after dreamily going through some perfunctory business, immediately retired to sleep after the stranger had gone. Congressmen and Senators had long since returned to their several constituencies with the various information that the country was going to ruin, or that the outlook never was more hopeful and cheering, as the tastes of their constituency indicated. A few Cabinet officers still lingered, having by this time become convinced that they could do nothing their own way, or indeed in any way but the old way, and getting gloomily resigned to their situation. A body of learned, cultivated men, representing the highest legal tribunal in the land, still lingered in a vague idea of earning the scant salary bestowed upon them by the economical founders of the Government,

and listened patiently to the arguments of counsel, whose fees for advocacy of claims before them would have paid the life income of half the bench. There was Mr. Attorney-General and his assistants still protecting the Government's millions from rapacious hands, and drawing the yearly public pittance that their wealthier private antagonists would have scarce given as a retainer to their junior counsel. The little standing army of departmental employes, —the helpless victims of the most senseless and idiotic form of discipline the world has known,—a discipline so made up of caprice, expediency, cowardice, and tyranny that its reform meant revolution, not to be tolerated by legislators and lawgivers, or a despotism in which half a dozen accidentally-chosen men interpreted their prejudices or preferences as being that Reform. Administration after administration and Party after Party had persisted in their desperate attempts to fit the youthful colonial garments, made by our Fathers after a by-gone fashion, over the expanded limits and generous outline of a matured nation. There were patches here and there; there were grievous rents

and holes here and there; there were ludicrous and painful exposures of growing limbs everywhere; and the Party in Power and the Party out of Power could do nothing but mend and patch, and revamp and cleanse and scour, and occasionally, in the wildness of despair, suggest even the cutting off the rebellious limbs that persisted in growing beyond the swaddling clothes of its infancy.

It was a capital of Contradictions and Inconsistencies. At one end of the Avenue sat the responsible High Keeper of the military honor, valor, and war-like prestige of a great nation, without the power to pay his own troops their legal dues until some selfish quarrel between Party and Party was settled. Hard by sat another Secretary, whose established functions seemed to be the misrepresentation of the nation abroad by the least characteristic of its classes, the politicians,—and only then when they had been defeated as politicians, and when their constituents had declared them no longer worthy to be even *their* representatives. This National Absurdity was only equaled by another, wherein an ex-Politician was

for four years expected to uphold the honor of a flag of a great nation over an ocean he had never tempted, with a discipline the rudiments of which he could scarcely acquire before he was removed, or his term of office expired, receiving his orders from a superior officer as ignorant of his special duties as himself, and subjected to the revision of a Congress cognizant of him only as a politician. At the farther end of the Avenue was another department so vast in its extent and so varied in its functions that few of the really great practical workers of the land would have accepted its responsibility for ten times its salary, but which the most perfect constitution in the world handed over to men who were obliged to make it a stepping stone to future preferment. There was another department, more suggestive of its financial functions from the occasional extravagances or economies exhibited in its pay-rolls,—successive Congresses having taken other matters out of its hands,—presided over by an official who bore the title and responsibility of the Custodian and Disburser of the Nation's Purse, and received a salary that a bank-President would have

sniffed at. For it was part of this Constitutional Inconsistency and Administrative Absurdity that in the matter of honor, justice, fidelity to trust, and even business integrity, the official was always expected to be the superior of the Government he represented. Yet the crowning Inconsistency was that, from time to time, it was submitted to the sovereign people to declare if these various Inconsistencies were not really the perfect expression of the most perfect Government the world had known. And it is to be recorded that the unanimous voices of Representative, Orator, and Unfettered Poetry were that it was!

Even the public press lent itself to the Great Inconsistency. It was as clear as crystal to the journal on one side of the Avenue that the country was going to the dogs unless the *spirit* of the Fathers once more reanimated the public; it was equally clear to the journal on the other side of the Avenue that only a rigid adherence to the *letter* of the Fathers would save the nation from decline. It was obvious to the first-named journal that the "letter" meant Government patronage to the other journal; it was patent to that journal that the

"shekels" of Senator X really animated the spirit of the Fathers. Yet all agreed it was a great and good and perfect government,—subject only to the predatory incursions of a Hydra-headed monster known as a "Ring." The Ring's origin was wrapped in secrecy, its fecundity was alarming; but although its rapacity was preternatural, its digestion was perfect and easy. It circumvolved all affairs in an atmosphere of mystery; it clouded all things with the dust and ashes of distrust. All disappointment of place, of avarice, of incompetency or ambition, was clearly attributable to it. It even permeated private and social life; there were Rings in our kitchen and household service; in our public schools, that kept the active intelligences of our children passive; there were Rings of engaging, handsome, dissolute young fellows, who kept us moral but unengaging seniors from the favors of the fair; there were subtle, conspiring Rings among our creditors, which sent us into bankruptcy and restricted our credit. In fact it would not be hazardous to say that all that was calamitous in public and private experience was clearly traceable to

that combination of power in a minority over weakness in a majority—known as a Ring.

Haply there was a body of demigods, as yet uninvoked, who should speedily settle all that. When Smith of Minnesota, Robinson of Vermont, and Jones of Georgia returned to Congress from these rural seclusions so potent with information and so freed from local prejudices, it was understood, vaguely, that great things would be done. This was always understood. There never was a time in the history of American politics when, to use the expression of the journals before alluded to, "the present session of Congress" did not "bid fair to be the most momentous in our history," and did not, as far as the facts go, leave a vast amount of unfinished important business lying hopelessly upon its desks, having "bolted" the rest as rashly and with as little regard to digestion or assimilation as the American traveller has for his railway refreshment.

In this capital, on this languid midsummer day, in an upper room of one of its second-rate hotels, the Honorable Pratt C. Gashwiler sat at his writing-table.

There are certain large, fleshy men with whom the omission of even a necktie or collar has all the effect of an indecent exposure. The Hon. Mr. Gashwiler, in his trousers and shirt, was a sight to be avoided by the modest eye. There were such palpable suggestions of vast extents of unctuous flesh in the slight glimpse offered by his open throat that his *dishabille* should have been as private as his business. Nevertheless, when there was a knock at his door he unhesitatingly said, "Come in!"—pushing away a goblet crowned with a certain aromatic herb with his right hand, while he drew towards him with his left a few proof slips of his forthcoming speech. The Gashwiler brow became, as it were, intelligently abstracted.

The intruder regarded Gashwiler with a glance of familiar recognition from his right eye, while his left took in a rapid survey of the papers on the table, and gleamed sardonically.

"You are at work, I see," he said apologetically.

"Yes," replied the Congressman, with an air of perfunctory weariness,—"one of my speeches. Those d—d printers make

such a mess of it; I suppose I don't write a very fine hand."

If the gifted Gashwiler had added that he did not write a very intelligent hand, or a very grammatical hand, and that his spelling was faulty, he would have been truthful, although the copy and proof before him might not have borne him out. The near fact was that the speech was composed and written by one Expectant Dobbs, a poor retainer of Gashwiler, and the honorable member's labor as a proof-reader was confined to the introduction of such words as "anarchy," "oligarchy," "satrap," "palladium," and "Argus-eyed" in the proof, with little relevancy as to position or place, and no perceptible effect as to argument.

The stranger saw all this with his wicked left eye, but continued to beam mildly with his right. Removing the coat and waistcoat of Gashwiler from a chair, he drew it towards the table, pushing aside a portly, loud-ticking watch,—the very image of Gashwiler,—that lay beside him, and, resting his elbows on the proofs, said:

"Well?"

"Have you anything new?" asked the parliamentary Gashwiler.

"Much! a woman!" replied the stranger.

The astute Gashwiler, waiting further information, concluded to receive this fact gaily and gallantly. "A woman?—my dear Mr. Wiles,—of course! The dear creatures," he continued, with a fat, offensive chuckle, "somehow are always making their charming presence felt. Ha! ha! A man, sir, in public life becomes accustomed to that sort of thing, and knows when he must be agreeable,—agreeable, sir, but firm! I've had my experience, sir, —my *own* experience,"—and the Congressman leaned back in his chair, not unlike a robust St. Anthony who had withstood one temptation to thrive on another.

"Yes," said Wiles impatiently, "but d—n it, she's on the *other side.*"

"The other side!" repeated Gashwiler vacantly.

"Yes, she's a niece of Garcia's. A little she devil."

"But Garcia's on our side," rejoined Gashwiler.

"Yes, but she is bought by the Ring."

"A woman!" sneered Mr. Gashwiler; "what can she do with men who won't be made fools of? Is she so handsome?"

"I never saw any great beauty in her," said Wiles shortly, "although they say that she's rather caught that d—d Thatcher, in spite of his coldness. At any rate, she is his *protégée*. But she isn't the sort you're thinking of, Gashwiler. They say she knows, or pretends to know, something about the grant. She may have got hold of some of her uncle's papers. Those Greasers were always d—d fools; and, if he did anything foolish, like as not he bungled or didn't cover up his tracks. And with his knowledge and facilities too! Why, if I'd—" but here Mr. Wiles stopped to sigh over the inequalities of fortune that wasted opportunities on the less skillful scamp.

Mr. Gashwiler became dignified. "She can do nothing with us," he said potentially.

Wiles turned his wicked eye on him. "Manuel and Miguel, who sold out to our man, are afraid of her. They were our witnesses. I verily believe they'd take back everything if she got after them.

And as for Pedro, he thinks she holds the power of life and death over him."

"Pedro! life and death,—what's all this?" said the astonished Gashwiler.

Wiles saw his blunder, but saw also that he had gone too far to stop. "Pedro," he said, "was strongly suspected of having murdered Concho, one of the original locators."

Mr. Gashwiler turned white as a sheet, and then flushed again into an apoplectic glow. "Do you dare to say," he began as soon as he could find his tongue and his legs, for in the exercise of his congressional functions these extreme members supported each other,—"do you mean to say," he stammered in rising rage, "that you have dared to deceive an American lawgiver into legislating upon a measure connected with a capital offense? Do I understand you to say, sir, that murder stands upon the record—stands upon the record, sir,—of this cause to which, as a representative of Remus, I have lent my official aid? Do you mean to say that you have deceived my constituency, whose sacred trust I hold, in inveigling me to hiding a crime from the Argus eyes of

justice?" And Mr. Gashwiler looked towards the bell-pull as if about to summon a servant to witness this outrage against the established judiciary.

"The murder, if it *was* a murder, took place before Garcia entered upon this claim, or had a footing in this court," returned Wiles blandly, "and is no part of the record."

"You are sure it is not spread upon the record?"

"I am. You can judge for yourself."

Mr. Gashwiler walked to the window, returned to the table, finished his liquor in a single gulp, and then, with a slight resumption of dignity, said:

"That alters the case."

Wiles glanced with his left eye at the Congressman. The right placidly looked out of the window. Presently he said quietly, "I've brought you the certificates of stock; do you wish them made out in your own name?"

Mr. Gashwiler tried hard to look as if he were trying to recall the meaning of Wiles's words. "Oh!—ah!—umph!—let me see,—oh, yes, the certificates,—certainly! Of course you will make them

out in the name of my secretary, Mr. Expectant Dobbs. They will perhaps repay him for the extra clerical labor required in the prosecution of your claim. He is a worthy young man. Although not a public officer, yet he is so near to me that perhaps I am wrong in permitting him to accept a fee for private interests. An American representative cannot be too cautious, Mr. Wiles. Perhaps you had better have also a blank transfer. The stock is, I understand, yet in the future. Mr. Dobbs, though talented and praiseworthy, is poor; he may wish to realize. If some—ahem! some *friend*—better circumstanced should choose to advance the cash to him and run the risk,—why, it would only be an act of kindness."

"You are proverbially generous, Mr. Gashwiler," said Wiles, opening and shutting his left eye like a dark lantern on the benevolent representative.

"Youth, when faithful and painstaking, should be encouraged," replied Mr. Gashwiler. "I lately had occasion to point this out in a few remarks I had to make before the Sabbath school reunion at Remus. Thank you, I will see that they are—

ahem!—conveyed to him. I shall give them to him with my own hand," he concluded, falling back in his chair, as if the better to contemplate the perspective of his own generosity and condescension. Mr. Wiles took his hat and turned to go. Before he reached the door Mr. Gashwiler returned to the social level with a chuckle:

"You say this woman, this Garcia's niece, is handsome and smart?"

"Yes."

"I can set another woman on the track that'll euchre her every time!"

Mr. Wiles was too clever to appear to notice the sudden lapse in the Congressman's dignity, and only said, with his right eye:

"Can you?"

"By G—d, I *will,* or I don't know how to represent Remus."

Mr. Wiles thanked him with his right eye, and looked a dagger with his left. "Good," he said, and added persuasively: "Does she live here?"

The Congressman nodded assent. "An awfully handsome woman,—a particular friend of mine!" Mr. Gashwiler here

looked as if he would not mind to have been rallied a little over his intimacy with the fair one; but the astute Mr. Wiles was at the same moment making up his mind, after interpreting the Congressman's look and manner, that he must know this fair incognita if he wished to sway Gashwiler, He determined to bide his time, and withdrew.

The door was scarcely closed upon him when another knock diverted Mr. Gashwiler's attention from his proofs. The door opened to a young man with sandy hair and anxious face. He entered the room deprecatingly, as if conscious of the presence of a powerful being, to be supplicated and feared. Mr. Gashwiler did not attempt to disabuse his mind. "Busy, you see," he said shortly, "correcting your work!"

"I hope it is acceptable?" said the young man timidly.

"Well—yes—it will do," said Gashwiler; "indeed I may say it is satisfactory on the whole," he added with the appearance of a large generosity; "quite satisfactory."

"You have no news, I suppose," contin-

ued the young man, with a slight flush, born of pride or expectation.

"No, nothing as yet." Mr. Gashwiler paused as if a thought had struck him.

"I have thought," he said, finally, "that some position—such as a secretaryship with me—would help you to a better appointment. Now, supposing that I make you my private secretary, giving you some important and confidential business. Eh?"

Dobbs looked at his patron with a certain wistful, dog-like expectancy, moved himself excitedly on his chair seat in a peculiar canine-like anticipation of gratitude, strongly suggesting that he would have wagged his tail if he had one. At which Mr. Gashwiler became more impressive.

"Indeed, I may say I anticipated it by certain papers I have put in your charge and in your name, only taking from you a transfer that might enable me to satisfy my conscience hereafter in recommending you as my—ahem!—private secretary. Perhaps, as a mere form, you might now, while you are here, put your name to these

transfers, and, so to speak, begin your duties at once."

The glow of pride and hope that mantled the cheek of poor Dobbs might have melted a harder heart than Gashwiler's. But the senatorial toga had invested Mr. Gashwiler with a more than Roman stoicism towards the feelings of others, and he only fell back in his chair in the pose of conscious rectitude as Dobbs hurriedly signed the paper.

"I shall place them in my portman-tell," said Gashwiler, suiting the word to the action, "for safe keeping. I need not inform you, who are now, as it were, on the threshold of official life, that perfect and inviolable secrecy in all affairs of State" —Mr. G. here motioned toward his portmanteau as if it contained a treaty at least—"is most essential and necessary."

Dobbs assented. "Then my duties will keep me with you here?" he asked doubtfully.

"No, no," said Gashwiler hastily; then, correcting himself, he added: "that is—for the present—no!"

Poor Dobbs's face fell. The near fact

was that he had lately had notice to quit his present lodgings in consequence of arrears in his rent, and he had a hopeful reliance that his confidential occupation would carry bread and lodging with it. But he only asked if there were any new papers to make out.

"Ahem! not at present; the fact is I am obliged to give so much of my time to callers—I have to-day been obliged to see half a dozen—that I must lock myself up and say 'Not at home' for the rest of the day." Feeling that this was an intimation that the interview was over, the new private secretary, a little dashed as to his near hopes, but still sanguine of the future, humbly took his leave.

But here a certain Providence, perhaps mindful of poor Dobbs, threw into his simple hands—to be used or not, if he were worthy or capable of using it—a certain power and advantage. He had descended the staircase, and was passing through the lower corridor, when he was made the unwilling witness of a remarkable assault.

It appeared that Mr. Wiles, who had quitted Gashwiler's presence as Dobbs was

announced, had other business in the hotel, and in pursuance of it had knocked at room No. 90. In response to the gruff voice that bade him enter, Mr. Wiles opened the door, and espied the figure of a tall, muscular, fiery-bearded man extended on the bed, with the bedclothes carefully tucked under his chin, and his arms lying flat by his side.

Mr. Wiles beamed with his right cheek, and advanced to the bed as if to take the hand of the stranger, who, however, neither by word or sign responded to his salutation.

"Perhaps I'm intruding?" said Mr. Wiles blandly.

"Perhaps you are," said Red Beard dryly.

Mr. Wiles forced a smile on his right cheek, which he turned to the smiter, but permitted the left to indulge in unlimited malevolence. "I wanted merely to know if you have looked into that matter?" he said meekly.

"I've looked into it and round it and across it and over it and through it," responded the man gravely, with his eyes fixed on Wiles.

"And you have perused all the papers?" continued Mr. Wiles.

"I've read every paper, every speech, every affidavit, every decision, every argument," said the stranger as if repeating a formula.

Mr. Wiles attempted to conceal his embarrassment by an easy, right-handed smile, that went off sardonically on the left, and continued: "Then I hope, my dear sir, that, having thoroughly mastered the case, you are inclined to be favorable to us?"

The gentleman in the bed did not reply, but apparently nestled more closely beneath the coverlids.

"I have brought the shares I spoke of," continued Mr. Wiles, insinuatingly.

"Hev you a friend within call?" interrupted the recumbent man gently.

"I don't quite understand!" smiled Mr. Wiles. "Of course any name you might suggest—"

"Hev you a friend, any chap that you might waltz in here at a moment's call?" continued the man in bed. "No? Do you know any of them waiters in the house? Thar's a bell over yan!" and he motioned

with his eyes towards the wall, but did not otherwise move his body.

"No," said Wiles, becoming slightly suspicious and wrathful.

"Mebbe a stranger might do? I reckon thar's one passin' in the hall. Call him in,—he'll do!"

Wiles opened the door a little impatiently, yet inquisitively, as Dobbs passed. The man in bed called out, "Oh, stranger!" and, as Dobbs stopped, said, "Come yar."

Dobbs entered a little timidly, as was his habit with strangers.

"I don't know who you be—nor care, I reckon," said the stranger. "This yer man"—pointing to Wiles—"is Wiles. I'm Josh Sibblee of Fresno, Member of Congress from the 4th Congressional District of Californy. I'm jist lying here, with a derringer into each hand,—jist lying here kivered up and holdin' in on'y to keep from blowin' the top o' this d—d skunk's head off. I kinder feel I can't hold in any longer. What I want to say to ye, stranger, is that this yer skunk—which his name is Wiles—hez bin tryin' his d—dest to get a bribe onto Josh, and

Josh, outo respect for his constituents, is jist waitin' for some stranger to waltz in and stop the d—dest fight—"

"But, my dear Mr. Sibblee, there must be some mistake," said Wiles earnestly.

"Mistake? Strip me!"

"No! No!" said Wiles, hurriedly, as the simple-minded Dobbs was about to draw down the coverlid.

"Take him away," said the Hon. Mr. Sibblee, "before I disgrace my constituency. They said I'd be in jail afore I get through the session. Ef you've got any humanity, stranger, snake him out, and pow'ful quick, too."

Dobbs, quite white and aghast, looked at Wiles and hesitated. There was a slight movement in the bed. Both men started for the door; and the next minute it closed very decidedly on the member from Fresno.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW IT WAS LOBBIED FOR.

The Hon. Pratt C. Gashwiler, M.C., was of course unaware of the incident described in the last chapter. His secret, even if it had been discovered by Dobbs, was safe in that gentleman's innocent and honorable hands, and certainly was not of a quality that Mr. Wiles, at present, would have cared to expose. For, in spite of Mr. Wiles's discomfiture, he still had enough experience of character to know that the irate member from Fresno would be satisfied with his own peculiar manner of vindicating his own personal integrity, and would not make a public scandal of it. Again, Wiles was convinced that Dobbs was equally implicated with Gashwiler, and would be silent for his own sake. So that poor Dobbs, as is too often the fate of simple but weak natures, had full

credit for duplicity by every rascal in the land.

From which it may be inferred that nothing occurred to disturb the security of Gashwiler. When the door closed upon Mr. Wiles, he indited a note which, with a costly but exceedingly distasteful bouquet, —rearranged by his own fat fingers, and discord and incongruity visible in every combination of color,—he sent off by a special messenger. Then he proceeded to make his toilet,—an operation rarely graceful or picturesque in our sex, and an insult to the spectator when obesity is superadded. When he had put on a clean shirt, of which there was grossly too much, and added a white waistcoat, that seemed to accent his rotundity, he completed his attire with a black frock coat of the latest style, and surveyed himself complacently before a mirror. It is to be recorded that, however satisfactory the result might have been to Mr. Gashwiler, it was not so to the disinterested spectator. There are some men on whom "that deformed thief, Fashion," avenges himself by making their clothes appear perennially new. The gloss of the tailor's iron never

disappears; the creases of the shelf perpetually rise in judgment against the wearer. Novelty was the general suggestion of Mr. Gashwiler's full-dress,—it was never his *habitude;*—and "Our own Make," "Nobby," and the "Latest Style, only $15," was as patent on the legislator's broad back as if it still retained the shopman's ticket.

Thus arrayed, within an hour he complacently followed the note and his floral offering. The house he sought had been once the residence of a foreign Ambassador, who had loyally represented his government in a single unimportant treaty, now forgotten, and in various receptions and dinners, still actively remembered by occasional visits to its *salon;* now the average dreary American parlor. "Dear me," the fascinating Mr. X would say, "but do you know, love, in this very room I remember meeting the distinguished Marquis of *Monte Pio;*" or perhaps the fashionable Jones of the State Department instantly crushed the decayed friend he was perfunctorily visiting by saying, "'Pon my soul, *you* here;—why, the last time I was in this room I gossiped for an hour with

the Countess *de Castenet* in that very corner." For, with the recall of the aforesaid Ambassador, the mansion had become a boarding-place, kept by the wife of a departmental clerk.

Perhaps there was nothing in the history of the house more quaint and philosophic than the story of its present occupant. Roger Fauquier had been a departmental clerk for forty years. It was at once his practical good luck and his misfortune to have been early appointed to a position which required a thorough and complete knowledge of the formulas and routine of a department that expended millions of the public funds. Fauquier, on a poor salary, diminishing instead of increasing with his service, had seen successive administrations bud and blossom and decay, but had kept his position through the fact that his knowledge was a necessity to the successive chiefs and employes. Once it was true that he had been summarily removed by a new Secretary, to make room for a camp follower, whose exhaustive and intellectual services in a political campaign had made him eminently fit for anything; but the alarming discovery that the new clerk's

knowledge of grammar and etymology was even worse than that of the Secretary himself, and that, through ignorance of detail, the business of that department was retarded to a damage to the Government of over half a million of dollars, led to the reinstatement of Mr. Fauquier—*at a lower salary.* For it was felt that something was wrong somewhere, and as it had always been the custom of Congress and the administration to cut down salaries as the first step to reform, they made of Mr. Fauquier a moral example. A gentleman born, of somewhat expensive tastes, having lived up to his former salary, this change brought another bread-winner into the field, Mrs. Fauquier, who tried, more or less unsuccessfully, to turn her old Southern habits of hospitality to remunerative account. But as poor Fauquier could never be prevailed upon to present a bill to a gentleman, sir, and as some of the scions of the best Southern families were still waiting for, or had been recently dismissed from, a position, the experiment was a pecuniary failure. Yet the house was of excellent repute and well patronized; indeed, it was worth something

to see old Fauquier sitting at the head of his own table, in something of his ancestral style, relating anecdotes of great men now dead and gone, interrupted only by occasional visits from importunate tradesmen.

Prominent among what Mr. Fauquier called his "little family" was a black-eyed lady of great powers of fascination, and considerable local reputation as a flirt. Nevertheless, these social aberrations were amply condoned by a facile and complacent husband, who looked with a lenient and even admiring eye upon the little lady's amusement, and to a certain extent lent a tacit indorsement to her conduct. Nobody minded Hopkinson; in the blaze of Mrs. Hopkinson's fascinations he was completely lost sight of. A few married women with unduly sensitive husbands, and several single ladies of the best and longest standing, reflected severely on her conduct. The younger men of course admired her, but I think she got her chief support from old fogies like ourselves. For it is your quiet, self-conceited, complacent, philosophic, broad-waisted *paterfamilias* who, after all, is the one to whom

the gay and giddy of the proverbially impulsive, unselfish sex owe their place in the social firmament. We are never inclined to be captious; we laugh at as a folly what our wives and daughters condemn as a fault; *our* "withers are unwrung," yet we still confess to the fascinations of a pretty face. We know, bless us, from dear experience, the exact value of one woman's opinion of another; we want our brilliant little friend to shine; it is only the moths who will burn their two-penny immature wings in the flame! And why should they not? Nature has been pleased to supply more moths than candles! Go to!—give the pretty creature —be she maid, wife, or widow—a show! And so, my dear sir, while *mater-familias* bends her black brows in disgust, we smile our superior little smile, and extend to Mistress *Anonyma* our gracious indorsement. And if giddiness is grateful, or if folly is friendly,—well, of course, *we* can't help that. Indeed it rather proves our theory.

I had intended to say something about Hopkinson; but really there is very little to say. He was invariably good humored.

A few ladies once tried to show him that he really ought to feel worse than he did about the conduct of his wife; and it is recorded that Hopkinson, in an excess of good humor and kindliness, promised to do so. Indeed the good fellow was so accessible that it is said that young DeLancy of the Tape Department confided to Hopkinson his jealousy of a rival; and revealed the awful secret that he (DeLancy) had reason to expect more loyalty from his (Hopkinson's) wife. The good fellow is reported to have been very sympathetic, and to have promised DeLancy to lend whatever influence he had with Mrs. Hopkinson in his favor. "You see," he said explanatorily to DeLancy, "she has a good deal to attend to lately, and I suppose has got rather careless,—that's women's ways. But if *I* can't bring her round I'll speak to Gashwiler,—I'll get him to use his influence with Mrs. Hop. So cheer up, my boy, *he'll* make it all right."

The appearance of a bouquet on the table of Mrs. Hopkinson was no rare event; nevertheless, Mr. Gashwiler's was not there. Its hideous contrasts had offended her woman's eye,—it is observable

that good taste survives the wreck of all the other feminine virtues,—and she had distributed it to make *boutonnières* for other gentlemen. Yet, when he appeared, she said to him hastily, putting her little hand over the cardiac region:

"I'm so glad you came. But you gave me *such* a fright an hour ago."

Mr. Gashwiler was both pleased and astounded. "What have I done, my dear Mrs. Hopkinson?" he began.

"Oh, don't talk," she said sadly. "What have you done, indeed! Why, you sent me that beautiful bouquet. I could not mistake your taste in the arrangement of the flowers;—but my husband was here. You know his jealousy. I was obliged to conceal it from him. *Never*—promise me now—*never* do it again."

Mr. Gashwiler gallantly protested.

"No! I am serious! I was so agitated: he must have seen me blush."

Nothing but the gross flattery to this speech could have clouded its manifest absurdity to the Gashwiler consciousness. But Mr. Gashwiler had already succumbed to the girlish half-timidity with which it

was uttered. Nevertheless, he could not help saying:

"But why should he be so jealous now? Only day before yesterday I saw Simpson of Duluth hand you a nosegay right before him!"

"Ah," returned the lady, "he was outwardly calm *then,* but you know nothing of the scene that occurred between us after you left."

"But," gasped the practical Gashwiler, "Simpson had given your husband that contract,—a cool fifty thousand in his pocket!"

Mrs. Hopkinson looked as dignifiedly at Gashwiler as was consistent with five feet three (the extra three inches being a pyramidal structure of straw-colored hair), a frond of faint curls, a pair of laughing blue eyes, and a small belted waist. Then she said, with a casting down of her lids:

"You forget that my husband loves me." And for once the minx appeared to look penitent. It was becoming; but as it had been originally practiced in a simple white dress, relieved only with pale-blue ribbons, it was not entirely in keeping with be-flounced lavender and rose-colored trim-

mings. Yet the woman who hesitates between her moral expression and the harmony of her dress is lost. And Mrs. Hopkinson was *victrix* by her very audacity.

Mr. Gashwiler was flattered. The most dissolute man likes the appearance of virtue. "But graces and accomplishments like yours, dear Mrs. Hopkinson," he said oleaginously, "belong to the whole country." Which, with something between a courtesy and a strut, he endeavored to represent. "And I shall want to avail myself of all," he added, "in the matter of the Castro claim. A little supper at Welcker's, a glass or two of champagne, and a single flash of those bright eyes, and the thing is done."

"But," said Mrs. Hopkinson, "I've promised Josiah that I would give up all those frivolities, and although my conscience is clear, you know how people talk! Josiah hears it. Why, only last night, at a reception at the Patagonian Minister's, every woman in the room gossiped about me because I led the german with him. As if a married woman, whose husband was interested in the Government,

could not be civil to the representative of a friendly power?"

Mr. Gashwiler did not see how Mr. Hopkinson's late contract for supplying salt pork and canned provisions to the army of the United States should make his wife susceptible to the advances of foreign princes; but he prudently kept that to himself. Still, not being himself a diplomat, he could not help saying:

"But I understood that Mr. Hopkinson did not object to your interesting yourself in this claim, and you know some of the stock ——"

The lady started, and said:

"Stock! Dear Mr. Gashwiler, for Heaven's sake don't mention that hideous name to me. Stock, I am sick of it! Have you gentlemen no other topic for a lady?"

She punctuated her sentence with a mischievous look at her interlocutor. For a second time I regret to say that Mr. Gashwiler succumbed. The Roman constituency at Remus, it is to be hoped, were happily ignorant of this last defection of their great legislator. Mr. Gashwiler instantly forgot his theme,—began to ply the lady with a certain bovine-like gal-

lantry, which it is to be said to her credit she parried with a playful, terrier-like dexterity, when the servant suddenly announced, "Mr. Wiles."

Gashwiler started. Not so Mrs. Hopkinson, who, however, prudently and quietly removed her own chair several inches from Gashwiler's.

"Do you know Mr. Wiles?" she asked pleasantly.

"No! That is, I—ah—yes, I may say I have had some business relations with him," responded Gashwiler rising.

"Won't you stay?" she added pleadingly. "Do!"

Mr. Gashwiler's prudence always got the better of his gallantry. "Not now," he responded in some nervousness. "Perhaps I had better go now, in view of what you have just said about gossip. You need not mention my name to this-er—this—Mr. Wiles." And with one eye on the door, and an awkward dash of his lips at the lady's fingers, he withdrew.

There was no introductory formula to Mr. Wiles's interview. He dashed at once *in medias res.* "Gashwiler knows a woman that, he says, can help us against that

Spanish girl who is coming here with proofs, prettiness, fascination, and what not! You must find her out."

"Why?" asked the lady laughingly.

"Because I don't trust that Gashwiler. A woman with a pretty face and an ounce of brains could sell him out; aye, and *us* with him."

"Oh, say *two* ounces of brains. Mr. Wiles, Mr. Gashwiler is no fool."

"Possibly, except when your sex is concerned, and it is very likely that the woman is his superior."

"I should think so," said Mrs. Hopkinson with a mischievous look.

"Ah, you know her, then?"

"Not so well as I know him," said Mrs. H. quite seriously. "I wish I did."

"Well, you'll find out if she's to be trusted! You are laughing,—it is a serious matter! This woman——"

Mrs. Hopkinson dropped him a charming courtesy and said,

"C'est moi!"

CHAPTER XII.

A RACE FOR IT.

Royal Thatcher worked hard. That the boyish little painter who shared his hospitality at the "Blue Mass" mine should afterward have little part in his active life seemed not inconsistent with his habits. At present the mine was his only mistress, claiming his entire time, exasperating him with fickleness, but still requiring that supreme devotion of which his nature was capable. It is possible that Miss Carmen saw this too, and so set about with feminine tact, if not to supplement, at least to make her rival less pertinacious and absorbing. Apart from this object, she zealously labored in her profession, yet with small pecuniary result, I fear. Local art was at a discount in California. The scenery of the country had not yet become famous; rather it was reserved for a

certain Eastern artist, already famous, to make it so; and people cared little for the reproduction, under their very noses, of that which they saw continually with their own eyes, and valued not. So that little Mistress Carmen was fain to divert her artist soul to support her plump little material body; and made divers excursions into the regions of ceramic art, painting on velvet, illuminating missals, decorating china, and the like. I have in my possession some wax flowers—a startling fuchsia and a bewildering dahlia—sold for a mere pittance by this little lady, whose pictures lately took the prize at a foreign exhibition, shortly after she had been half starved by a California public, and claimed by a California press as its fostered child of genius.

Of these struggles and triumphs Thatcher had no knowledge; yet he was perhaps more startled than he would own to himself when, one December day, he received this despatch: "Come to Washington at once.—Carmen de Haro."

"Carmen de Haro!" I grieve to state that such was the preoccupation of this man, elected by fate to be the hero of the

solitary amatory episode of his story, that for a moment he could not recall her. When the honest little figure that had so manfully stood up against him, and had proved her sex by afterwards running away from him, came back at last to his memory, he was at first mystified and then self-reproachful. He had been, he felt vaguely, untrue to himself. He had been remiss to the self-confessed daughter of his enemy. Yet why should she telegraph to him, and what was she doing in Washington? To all these speculations it is to be said to his credit that he looked for no sentimental or romantic answer. Royal Thatcher was naturally modest and self-depreciating in his relations to the other sex, as indeed most men who are apt to be successful with women generally are, despite a vast degree of superannuated bosh to the contrary. To the half dozen women who are startled by sheer audacity into submission there are scores who are piqued by a self-respectful patience; and where a women has to do half the wooing, she generally makes a pretty sure thing of it.

In his bewilderment Thatcher had overlooked a letter lying on his table. It was

from his Washington lawyer. The concluding paragraph caught his eye,—"Perhaps it would be well if you came here yourself. Roscommon is here; and they say there is a niece of Garcia's, lately appeared, who is likely to get up a strong social sympathy for the old Mexican. I don't know that they expect to prove anything by her; but I'm told she is attractive and clever, and has enlisted the sympathies of the delegation." Thatcher laid the letter down a little indignantly. Strong men are quite as liable as weak women are to sudden inconsistencies on any question they may have in common. What right had this poor little bud he had cherished, —he was quite satisfied now that he had cherished her, and really had suffered from her absence,—what right had she to suddenly blossom in the sunshine of power to be, perhaps, plucked and worn by one of his enemies? He did not agree with his lawyer that she was in any way connected with his enemies: he trusted to her masculine loyalty that far. But here was something vaguely dangerous to the feminine mind,—position, flattery, power. He was almost as firmly satisfied now that he had

been wronged and neglected as he had been positive a few moments before that he had been remiss in his attention. The irritation, although momentary, was enough to decide this strong man. He telegraphed to San Francisco; and, having missed the steamer, secured an overland passage to Washington; thought better of it, and partly changed his mind an hour after the ticket was purchased; but, manlike, having once made a practical step in a wrong direction, he kept on rather than admit an inconsistency to himself. Yet he was not entirely satisfied that his journey was a business one. The impulsive, weak little Mistress Carmen had prudently scored one against the strong man.

Only a small part of the present great trans-continental railway at this time had been built, and was but piers at either end of a desolate and wild expanse as yet unbridged. When the overland traveller left the rail at Reno, he left, as it were, civilization with it; and, until he reached the Nebraska frontier, the rest of his road was only the old emigrant trail traversed by the coaches of the Overland Company. Excepting a part of "Devil's Cañon," the way

was unpicturesque and flat; and the passage of the Rocky Mountains, far from suggesting the alleged poetry of that region, was only a reminder of those sterile distances of a level New England landscape.

The journey was a dreary monotony that was scarcely enlivened by its discomforts, never amounting to actual accident or incident, but utterly destructive to all nervous tissue. Insanity often supervened. "On the third day out," said Hank Monk, driver, speaking casually but charitably of a "fare,"—"on the third day out, after axing no end of questions and getting no answers, he took to chewing straws that he picked outer the cushion, and kussin' to hisself. From that very day I knew it was all over with him, and I handed him over to his friends at 'Shy Ann,' strapped to the back seat, and ravin' and cussin' at Ben Holliday, the gent'manly proprietor." It is presumed that the unfortunate tourist's indignation was excited at the late Mr. Benjamin Holliday, then the proprietor of the line,—an evidence of his insanity that no one who knew that large-hearted, fastidious, and elegantly-cultured Cali-

fornian, since allied to foreign nobility, will for a moment doubt.

Mr. Royal Thatcher was too old and experienced a mountaineer to do aught but accept patiently and cynically his brother Californian's method of increasing his profits. As it was generally understood that any one who came from California by that route had some dark design, the victim received little sympathy. Thatcher's equable temperament and indomitable will stood him in good stead, and helped him cheerfully in this emergency. He ate his scant meals, and otherwise took care of the functions of his weak human nature, when and where he could, without grumbling, and at times earned even the praise of his driver by his ability to "rough it." Which "roughing it," by the way, meant the ability of the passengers to accept the incompetency of the Company. It is true there were times when he regretted that he had not taken the steamer; but then he reflected that he was one of a Vigilance Committee, sworn to hang that admirable man, the late Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, for certain practices and cruelties done upon the bodies of certain steerage passen-

gers by his line, and for divers irregularities in their transportation. I mention this fact merely to show how so practical and stout a voyager as Thatcher might have confounded the perplexities attending the administration of a great steamship company with selfish greed and brutality; and that he, with other Californians, may not have known the fact, since recorded by the Commodore's family clergyman, that the great millionaire was always true to the hymns of his childhood.

Nevertheless, Thatcher found time to be cheerful and helpful to his fellow passengers, and even to be so far interesting to "Yuba Bill," the driver, as to have the box seat placed at his disposal. "But," said Thatcher, in some concern, "the box seat was purchased by that other gentleman in Sacramento. He paid extra for it, and his name's on your way-bill!" "That," said Yuba Bill, scornfully, "don't fetch me even ef he'd chartered the whole shebang. Look yar, do you reckon I'm goin' to spile my temper by setting next to a man with a game eye? And such an eye! Gewhillikins! Why, darn my skin, the other day when we war watering at

Webster's, he got down and passed in front of the off-leader,—that yer *pinto* colt that's bin accustomed to injins, grizzlies, and buffalo, and I'm bless ef, when her eye tackled his, ef she didn't jist git up and rar round that I reckoned I'd hev to go down and take them blinders off from *her* eyes and clap on *his.*" "But he paid the money, and is entitled to his seat," persisted Thatcher. "Mebbe he is—in the office of the Kempeny," growled Yuba Bill; "but it's time some folks knowed that out in the plains I run this yer team myself."—A fact which was self-evident to most of the passengers. "I suppose his authority is as absolute on this dreary waste as a ship captain's in mid ocean," exclaimed Thatcher to the baleful-eyed stranger. Mr. Wiles—whom the reader has recognized—assented with the public side of his face, but looked vengeance at Yuba Bill with the other, while Thatcher, innocent of the presence of one of his worst enemies, placated Bill so far as to restore Wiles to his rights. Wiles thanked him. "Shall I have the pleasure of your company far?" Wiles asked insinuatingly. "To Washington," replied Thatcher frank-

ly. "Washington is a gay city during the session," again suggested the stranger. "I'm going on business," said Thatcher bluntly.

A trifling incident occurred at Pine-Tree Crossing which did not heighten Yuba Bill's admiration of the stranger. As Bill opened the double-locked box in the "boot" of the coach—sacred to Wells, Fargo & Co.'s Express and the Overland Company's treasures—Mr. Wiles perceived a small, black morocco portemanteau among the parcels. "Ah, you carry baggage there too?" he said sweetly. "Not often," responded Yuba Bill shortly. "Ah, this then contains valuables?" "It belongs to that man whose seat you've got," said Yuba Bill, who, for insulting purposes of his own, preferred to establish the fiction that Wiles was an interloper; "and ef he reckons, in a sorter mixed kempeny like this, to lock up his portmantle, I don't know who's business it is. Who?" continued Bill, lashing himself into a simulated rage, "who, in blank, is running this yer team? Hey? Mebbe you think, sittin' up thar on the box seat, you are. Mebbe you think you kin see round corners with that thar

eye, and kin pull up for teams round corners, on down grades, a mile ahead?" But here Thatcher, who, with something of Lancelot's concern for Modred, had a noble pity for all infirmities, interfered so sternly that Yuba Bill stopped.

On the fourth day they struck a blinding snow-storm, while ascending the dreary plateau that henceforward for six hundred miles was to be their roadbed. The horses, after floundering through the drift, gave out completely on reaching the next station, and the prospects ahead, to all but the experienced eye, looked doubtful. A few passengers advised taking to sledges, others a postponement of the journey until the weather changed. Yuba Bill alone was for pressing forward as they were. "Two miles more and we're on the high grade, whar the wind is strong enough to blow you through the windy, and jist peart enough to pack away over them cliffs every inch of snow that falls. I'll jist skirmish round in and out o' them drifts on these four wheels whar ye can't drag one o' them flat-bottomed dry-goods boxes through a drift." Bill had a California whip's contempt for a sledge. But he was warmly

seconded by Thatcher, who had the next best thing to experience, the instinct that taught him to read character, and take advantage of another man's experience. "Them that wants to stop kin do so," said Bill authoritatively, cutting the Gordian knot; "them as wants to take a sledge can do so,—thar's one in the barn. Them as wants to go on with me and the relay will come on." Mr. Wiles selected the sledge and a driver, a few remained for the next stage, and Thatcher, with two others, decided to accompany Yuba Bill. These changes took up some valuable time; and the storm continuing, the stage was run under the shed, the passengers gathering around the station fire; and not until after midnight did Yuba Bill put in the relays. "I wish you a good journey," said Wiles, as he drove from the shed as Bill entered. Bill vouchsafed no reply, but, addressing himself to the driver, said curtly, as if giving an order for the delivery of goods, "Shove him out at Rawlings," and passed contemptuously around to the tail board of the sled, and returned to the harnessing of his relay.

The moon came out and shone high as

Yuba Bill once more took the reins in his hands. The wind, which instantly attacked them as they reached the level, seemed to make the driver's theory plausible, and for half a mile the roadbed was swept clean, and frozen hard. Further on a tongue of snow, extending from a boulder to the right, reached across their path to the height of two or three feet. But Yuba Bill dashed through a part of it, and by skillful maneuvering circumvented the rest. But even as the obstacle was passed, the coach dropped with an ominous lurch on one side, and the off fore wheel flew off in the darkness. Bill threw the horses back on their haunches; but, before their momentum could be checked, the near hind wheel slipped away, the vehicle rocked violently, plunged backwards and forwards, and stopped.

Yuba Bill was on the road in an instant with his lantern. Then followed an outbreak of profanity which I regret, for artistic purposes, exceeds that generous limit which a sympathizing public has already extended to me in the explication of character. Let me state, therefore, that in a very few moments he succeeded in dis-

paraging the characters of his employers, their male and female relatives, the coach builder, the station keeper, the road on which he travelled, and the travellers themselves, with occasional broad expletives addressed to himself and his own relatives. For the spirit of this and a more cultivated poetry of expression, I beg to refer the temperate reader to the 3d chapter of Job.

The passengers knew Bill, and sat, conservative, patient, and expectant. As yet the cause of the catastrophe was not known. At last Thatcher's voice came from the box seat:

"What's up, Bill?"

"Not a blank lynch pin in the whole blank coach," was the answer.

There was a dead silence. Yuba Bill executed a wild war dance of helpless rage.

"Blank the blank *enchanted* thing to blank!"

(I beg here to refer the fastidious and cultivated reader to the only adjective I have dared transcribe of this actual oath which I once had the honor of hearing. He will I trust not fail to recognize the old classic *dæmon* in this wild western objurgation.)

"Who did it?" asked Thatcher.

Yuba Bill did not reply, but dashed up again to the box, unlocked the "boot," and screamed out:

"The man that stole your portmantle, —Wiles!"

Thatcher laughed:

"Don't worry about that, Bill. A 'biled' shirt, an extra collar, and a few papers. Nothing more."

Yuba Bill slowly descended. When he reached the ground, he plucked Thatcher aside by his coat sleeve:

"Ye don't mean to say ye had nothing in that bag ye was trying to get away with?"

"No," said the laughing Thatcher frankly.

"And that Wiles warn't one o' them detectives?"

"Not to my knowledge, certainly."

Yuba Bill sighed sadly, and returned to assist in the replacing of the coach on its wheels again.

"Never mind, Bill," said one of the passengers sympathizingly, "we'll catch that man Wiles at Rawlings sure;" and he looked around at the inchoate vigilance

committee, already "rounding into form" about him.

"Ketch him!" returned Yuba Bill, derisively, "why we've got to go back to the station; and afore we're off agin he's pinted fur Clarmont on the relay we lose. Ketch him! H—ll's full of such ketches!"

There was clearly nothing to do but to go back to the station to await the repairing of the coach. While this was being done Yuba Bill again drew Thatcher aside:

"I allers suspected that chap's game eye, but I didn't somehow allow for anything like this. I reckoned it was only the square thing to look arter things gen'rally, and 'specially your traps. So, to purvent troubil, and keep things about ekal, ez he was goin' away, I sorter lifted this yer bag of hiz outer the tail board of his sleigh. I don't know as it is any exchange or compensation, but it may give ye a chance to spot him agin, or him you. It strikes me as bein' far-minded and squar';" and with these words he deposited at the feet of the astounded Thatcher the black travelling bag of Mr. Wiles.

"But, Bill,—see here! I can't take this!" interrupted Thatcher hastily. "You

can't swear that he's taken my bag,—and —and,—blank it all,—this won't do, you know. I've no right to this man's things, even if ——"

"Hold your hosses," said Bill gravely; "I ondertook to take charge o' your traps. I didn't—at least that d—d wall-eyed— Thar's a portmantle! I don't know who's it is. Take it."

Half amused, half embarrassed, yet still protesting, Thatcher took the bag in his hands.

"Ye might open it in my presence," suggested Yuba Bill gravely.

Thatcher, half laughingly, did so. It was full of papers and semi-legal-looking documents. Thatcher's own name on one of them caught his eye; he opened the paper hastily and perused it. The smile faded from his lips.

"Well," said Yuba Bill, "suppose we call it a fair exchange at present."

Thatcher was still examining the papers. Suddenly this cautious, strong-minded man looked up into Yuba Bill's waiting face, and said quietly, in the despicable slang of the epoch and region:

"It's a go! Suppose we do."

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW IT BECAME FAMOUS.

Yuba Bill was right in believing that Wiles would lose no time at Rawlings. He left there on a fleet horse before Bill had returned with the broken-down coach to the last station, and distanced the telegram sent to detain him two hours. Leaving the stage road and its dangerous telegraphic stations, he pushed southward to Denver over the army trail, in company with a half-breed packer, crossing the Missouri before Thatcher had reached Julesburg. When Thatcher was at Omaha, Wiles was already in St. Louis; and as the Pullman car containing the hero of the "Blue Mass" mine rolled into Chicago, Wiles was already walking the streets of the national capital. Nevertheless, he had time *en route* to sink in the waters of the North Platte, with many expressions of disgust,

the little black portmanteau belonging to Thatcher, containing his dressing case, a few unimportant letters, and an extra shirt, to wonder why simple men did not travel with their important documents and valuables, and to set on foot some prudent and cautious inquiries regarding his own lost carpet bag and its important contents.

But for these trifles he had every reason to be satisfied with the progress of his plans. "It's all right," said Mrs. Hopkinson merrily; "while you and Gashwiler have been working with your 'stock,' and treating the whole world as if it could be bribed, I've done more with that earnest, self-believing, self-deceiving, and perfectly pathetic Roscommon than all you fellows put together. Why, I've told his pitiful story, and drawn tears from the eyes of Senators and Cabinet Ministers. More than that, I've introduced him into society, put him in a dress coat,—such a figure!—and you know how the best folk worship everything that is *outre* as the sincere thing. I've made him a complete success. Why, only the other night, when Senator Misnancy and Judge Fitzdawdle were here, after making him tell his story,—

which you know I think he really believes, —I sang 'There came to the beach a poor Exile of Erin,' and my husband told me afterwards it was worth at least a dozen votes."

"But about this rival of yours,—this niece of Garcia's?"

"Another of your blunders; you men know nothing of women. Firstly, she's a swarthy little brunette, with dots for eyes; and strides like a man, dresses like a dowdy, don't wear stays, and has no style. Then, she's a single woman, and alone; and, although she affects to be an artist, and has Bohemian ways, don't you see she can't go into society without a chaperon or somebody to go with her? Nonsense."

"But," persisted Wiles, "she must have some power; there's Judge Mason and Senator Peabody, who are constantly talking about her; and Dinwiddie of Virginia escorted her through the Capitol the other day."

Mistress Hopkinson laughed. "Mason and Peabody aspire to be thought literary and artistic, and Dinwiddie wanted to pique *me!*"

"But Thatcher is no fool—"

"Is Thatcher a lady's man?" queried the lady suddenly.

"Hardly, I should say," responded Wiles. "He pretends to be absorbed in his swindle and devoted to his mine; and I don't think that even you—" he stopped with a slight sneer.

"There, you are misunderstanding me again, and, what is worse, you are misunderstanding your case. Thatcher is pleased with her because he has probably seen no one else. Wait till he comes to Washington and has an opportunity for comparison;" and she cast a frank glance at her mirror, where Wiles, with a sardonic bow, left her standing.

Mr. Gashwiler was quite as confident of his own success with Congress. "We are within a few days of the end of the session. We will manage to have it taken up and rushed through before that fellow Thatcher knows what he is about."

"If it could be done before he gets here," said Wiles, "it's a reasonably sure thing. He is delayed two days: he might have been delayed longer." Here Mr. Wiles sighed. If the accident had happened on a mountain road, and the stage had been

precipitated over the abyss, what valuable time would have been saved, and success become a surety. But Mr. Wiles's functions as an advocate did not include murder; at least, he was doubtful if it could be taxed as costs.

"We need have no fears, sir," resumed Mr. Gashwiler; "The matter is now in the hands of the highest tribunal of appeal in the country. It will meet, sir, with inflexible justice. I have already prepared some remarks—"

"By the way," interrupted Wiles infelicitously, "where's your young man,—your private secretary,—Dobbs?"

The Congressman for a moment looked confused. "He is not here. And I must correct your error in applying that term to him. I have never put my confidence in the hands of any one."

"But you introduced him to me as your secretary?"

"A mere honorary title, sir. A brevet rank. I might, it is true, have thought to repose such a trust in him. But I was deceived, sir, as I fear I am too apt to be when I permit my feelings as a man to overcome my duty as an American legis-

lator. Mr. Dobbs enjoyed my patronage and the opportunity it gave me to introduce him into public life only to abuse it. He became, I fear, deeply indebted. His extravagance was unlimited, his ambition unbounded, but without, sir, a cash basis. I advanced money to him from time to time upon the little property you so generously extended to him for his services. But it was quickly dissipated. Yet, sir, such is the ingratitude of man that his family lately appealed to me for assistance. I felt it was necessary to be stern, and I refused. I would not for the sake of his family say anything, but I have missed, sir, books from my library. On the day after he left, two volumes of Patent Office reports and a Blue Book of Congress, purchased that day by me at a store on Pennsylvania avenue, were *missing,*—missing! I had difficulty, sir, great difficulty in keeping it from the papers!"

As Mr. Wiles had heard the story already from Gashwiler's acquaintances, with more or less free comment on the gifted legislator's economy, he could not help thinking that the difficulty had been

great indeed. But he only fixed his malevolent eye on Gashwiler and said:

"So he is gone, eh?"

"Yes."

"And you've made an enemy of him? That's bad."

Mr. Gashwiler tried to look dignifiedly unconcerned; but something in his visitor's manner made him uneasy.

"I say it is bad, if you have. Listen. Before I left here, I found at a boarding-house where he had boarded, and still owed a bill, a trunk which the landlord retained. Opening it, I found some letters and papers to yours, with certain memoranda of his, which I thought ought to be in *your* possession. As an alleged friend of his, I redeemed the trunk by paying the amount of his bill, and secured the more valuable papers."

Gashwiler, whose face had grown apoplectically suffused as Wiles went on, at last gasped: "But you got the trunk, and have the papers?"

"Unfortunately, no; and that's why it's bad."

"But, good God! what have you done with them?"

"I've lost them somewhere on the Overland Road."

Mr. Gashwiler sat for a few moments speechless, vacillating between a purple rage and a pallid fear. Then he said hoarsely:

"They are all blank forgeries,—every one of them."

"Oh, no!" said Wiles, smiling blandly on his dexter side, and enjoying the whole scene malevolently with his sinister eye. "*Your* papers are all genuine, and I won't say are not all right, but unfortunately I had in the same bag some memoranda of my own for the use of my client, that, you understand, might be put to some bad use if found by a clever man."

The two rascals looked at each other. There is on the whole really very little "honor among thieves,"—at least great ones,—and the inferior rascal succumbed at the reflection of what *he* might do if he were in the other rascal's place. "See here, Wiles," he said, relaxing his dignity with the perspiration that oozed from every pore, and made the collar of his shirt a mere limp rag. "See here, *We*"—this first use of the plural was equivalent

to a confession—"*we* must get them papers."

"Of course," said Wiles coolly, "if we *can,* and if Thatcher doesn't get wind of them."

"He cannot."

"He was on the coach when I lost them, coming East."

Mr. Gashwiler paled again. In the emergency he had recourse to the sideboard and a bottle, forgetting Wiles. Ten minutes before Wiles would have remained seated; but it is recorded that he rose, took the bottle from the gifted Gashwiler's fingers, helped himself *first,* and then sat down.

"Yes, but, my boy," said Gashwiler, now rapidly changing situations with the cooler Wiles; "yes, but, old fellow," he added, poking Wiles with a fat forefinger, "don't you see the whole thing will be up before he gets here?"

"Yes," said Wiles gloomily, "but those lazy, easy, honest men have a way of popping up just at the nick of time. They never need hurry; all things wait for them. Why, don't you remember that on the very day Mrs. Hopkinson and I and you got the

President to sign that patent, that very day one of them d—n fellows turns up from San Francisco or Australia, having taken his own time to get here,—gets here about half an hour after the President had signed the patent and sent it over to the office, finds the right man to introduce him to the President, has a talk with him, makes him sign an order countermanding its issuance, and undoes all that has been done in six years in one hour."

"Yes, but Congress is a tribunal that does not revoke its decrees," said Gashwiler with a return of his old manner; "at least," he added, observing an incredulous shrug in the shoulder of his companion, "at least *during the session.*"

"We shall see," said Wiles, quietly taking his hat.

"We shall see, sir," said the member from Remus with dignity.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT CULTURE DID FOR IT.

There was at this time in the Senate of the United States an eminent and respected gentleman, scholarly, orderly, honorable, and radical,—the fit representative of a scholarly, orderly, honorable, and radical Commonwealth. For many years he had held his trust with conscious rectitude, and a slight depreciation of other forms of merit; and for as many years had been as regularly returned to his seat by his constituency with equally conscious rectitude in themselves and an equal skepticism regarding others. Removed by his nature beyond the reach of certain temptations, and by circumstances beyond even the knowledge of others, his social and political integrity was spotless. An orator and practical debater, his refined tastes kept him from personality, and the public

recognition of the complete unselfishness of his motives and the magnitude of his dogmas protected him from scurrility. His principles had never been appealed to by a bribe; he had rarely been approached by an emotion.

A man of polished taste in art and literature, and possessing the means to gratify it, his luxurious home was filled with treasures he had himself collected, and further enhanced by the stamp of his appreciation. His library had not only the elegance of adornment that his wealth could bring and his taste approve, but a certain refined negligence of habitual use, and the easy disorder of the artist's workshop. All this was quickly noted by a young girl who stood on its threshold at the close of a dull January day.

The card that had been brought to the Senator bore the name of "Carmen de Haro"; and modestly in the right hand corner, in almost microscopic script, the further description of herself as "Artist." Perhaps the picturesqueness of the name, and its historic suggestion caught the scholar's taste, for when to his request, through his servant, that she would be kind enough

to state her business, she replied as frankly that her business was personal to himself, he directed that she should be admitted. Then entrenching himself behind his library table, overlooking a bastion of books, and a *glacis* of pamphlets and papers, and throwing into his forehead and eyes an expression of utter disqualification for anything but the business before him, he calmly awaited the intruder.

She came, and for an instant stood, hesitatingly, framing herself as a picture in the door. Mrs. Hopkinson was right,—she had "no style," unless an original and half-foreign quaintness could be called so. There was a desperate attempt visible to combine an American shawl with the habits of a *mantilla,* and it was always slipping from one shoulder, that was so supple and vivacious as to betray the deficiencies of an education in stays. There was a cluster of black curls around her low forehead, fitting her so closely as to seem to be a part of the seal-skin cap she wore.

Once, from the force of habit, she attempted to put her shawl over her head and talk through the folds gathered under

her chin, but an astonished look from the Senator checked her. Nevertheless, he felt relieved, and rising, motioned her to a chair with a heartiness he would have scarcely shown to a Parisian *toilleta.* And when, with two or three quick, long steps, she reached his side, and showed a frank, innocent, but strong and determined little face, feminine only in its flash of eye and beauty of lip and chin curves, he put down the pamphlet he had taken up somewhat ostentatiously, and gently begged to know her business.

I think I have once before spoken of her voice,—an organ more often cultivated by my fair country-women for singing than for speaking, which, considering that much of our practical relations with the sex are carried on without the aid of an opera score, seems a mistaken notion of theirs,—and of its sweetness, gentle inflexion, and musical emphasis. She had the advantage of having been trained in a musical language, and came of a race with whom catarrhs and sore throats were rare. So that in a few brief phrases she sang the Senator into acquiescence as she imparted the plain libretto of her business,—

namely, a "desire to see some of his rare engravings."

Now the engravings in question were certain etchings of the early Great Apprentices of the art, and were, I am happy to believe, extremely rare. From my unprofessional view they were exceedingly bad,—showing the mere genesis of something since perfected, but dear, of course, to the true collector's soul. I don't believe that Carmen really admired them either. But the minx knew that the Senator prided himself on having the only "pot-hooks" of the great "A," or the first artistic efforts of "B,"—I leave the real names to be filled in by the connoisseur,—and the Senator became interested. For the last year, two or three of these abominations had been hanging in his study, utterly ignored by the casual visitor. But here was appreciation! "She was," she added, "only a poor young artist, unable to purchase such treasures, but equally unable to resist the opportunity afforded her, even at the risk of seeming bold, or of obtruding upon a great man's privacy," &c. &c.

This flattery, which, if offered in the usual legal tender of the country, would

have been looked upon as counterfeit, delivered here in a foreign accent, with a slightly tropical warmth, was accepted by the Senator as genuine. These children of the Sun are so impulsive! We, of course, feel a little pity for the person who thus transcends our standard of good taste and violates our conventional canon,—but they are always sincere. The cold New Englander saw nothing wrong in one or two direct and extravagant compliments, that would have insured his visitor's early dismissal if tendered in the clipped metallic phrases of the Commonwealth he represented.

So that in a few moments the black, curly head of the little artist and the white, flowing locks of the Senator were close together bending over the rack that contained the engravings. It was then that Carmen, listening to a graphic description of the early rise of Art in the Netherlands, forgot herself and put her shawl around her head, holding its folds in her little brown hand. In this situation they were, at different times during the next two hours, interrupted by five Congressmen, three Senators, a Cabinet

officer, and a Judge of the Supreme Bench, —each of whom was quickly but courteously dismissed. Popular sentiment, however, broke out in the hall.

"Well, I'm blanked, but this gets me." (The speaker was a Territorial delegate.)

"At his time o' life, too, lookin' over pictures with a gal young enough to be his grandchild." (This from a venerable official, since suspected of various erotic irregularities.)

"She don't handsome any." (The honorable member from Dakota.)

"This accounts for his protracted silence during the sessions." (A serious colleague from the Senator's own State.)

"Oh, blank it all!" (*Omnes.*)

Four went home to tell their wives. There are few things more touching in the matrimonial compact than the superb frankness with which each confides to each the various irregularities of their friends. It is upon these sacred confidences that the firm foundations of marriage rest unshaken.

Of course the objects of this comment, at least *one* of them, were quite oblivious. "I trust," said Carmen, timidly, when

they had for the fourth time regarded in rapt admiration an abominable something by some Dutch wood-chopper, "I trust I am not keeping you from your great friends:"—her pretty eyelids were cast down in tremulous distress:—"I should never forgive myself. Perhaps it is important business of the State?"

"Oh, dear, no!" *They* will come again,—it's *their* business."

The Senator meant it kindly. It was as near the perilous edge of a compliment as your average cultivated Boston man ever ventures, and Carmen picked it up, femininely, by its sentimental end. "And I suppose *I* shall not trouble you again?"

"I shall always be proud to place the portfolio at your disposal. Command me at any time," said the Senator, with dignity.

"You are kind. You are good," said Carmen, "and I—I am but,—look you,—only a poor girl from California, that you know not."

"Pardon me, I know your country well." And indeed he could have told her the exact number of bushels of wheat to

the acre in her own county of Monterey, its voting population, its political bias. Yet of the more important product before him, after the manner of book-read men, he knew nothing.

Carmen was astonished, but respectful. It transpired presently that she was not aware of the rapid growth of the silk worm in her own district, knew nothing of the Chinese question, and very little of the American mining laws. Upon these questions the Senator enlightened her fully. "Your name is historic, by the way," he said pleasantly. "There was a Knight of Alcantara, a "De Haro," one of the emigrants with Las Casas."

Carmen nodded her head quickly, "Yes; my great-great-great-g-r-e-a-t grandfather!"

The Senator stared.

"Oh, yes. I am the niece of Victor Castro, who married my father's sister."

"The Victor Castro of the 'Blue Mass' mine?" asked the Senator abruptly.

"Yes," she said quietly.

Had the Senator been of the Gashwiler type, he would have expressed himself, after the average masculine fashion, by a

long-drawn whistle. But his only perceptible appreciation of a sudden astonishment and suspicion in his mind was a lowering of the social thermometer of the room so decided that poor Carmen looked up innocently, chilled, and drew her shawl closer around her shoulders.

"I have something more to ask," said Carmen, hanging her head,—"it is a great, oh, a very great favor."

The Senator had retreated behind his bastion of books again, and was visibly preparing for an assault. He saw it all now. He had been, in some vague way, deluded. He had given confidential audience to the niece of one of the Great Claimants before Congress. The inevitable axe had come to the grindstone. What might not this woman dare ask of him? He was the more implacable that he felt he had already been prepossessed—and honestly prepossessed—in her favor. He was angry with her for having pleased him. Under the icy polish of his manner there were certain Puritan callosities caused by early straight-lacing. He was not yet quite free from his ancestor's cheerful ethics that Nature, as represented by an

Impulse, was as much to be restrained as Order represented by a Quaker.

Without apparently noticing his manner, Carmen went on, with a certain potential freedom of style, gesture, and manner scarcely to be indicated in her mere words. "You know, then, I am of Spanish blood, and that, what was my adopted country, our motto was, 'God and Liberty.' It was of you, sir,—the great Emancipator,—the apostle of that Liberty, —the friend of the down-trodden and oppressed,—that I, as a child, first knew. In the histories of this great country I have read of you, I have learned your orations. I have longed to hear you in your own pulpit deliver the creed of my ancestors. To hear you, of yourself, speak, ah! *Madre de Dios!* what shall I say,—speak the oration eloquent,—to make the—what you call—the debate, that is what I have for so long hoped. Eh! Pardon,—you are thinking me foolish,—wild, eh?—a small child,—eh?"

Becoming more and more dialectical as she went on, she said suddenly, "I have you of myself offended. You are mad of me as a bold, bad child? It is so?"

The Senator, as visibly becoming limp and weak again behind his entrenchments, managed to say, "Oh, no!" then, "really!" and finally, "Tha-a-nks!"

"I am here but for a day. I return to California in a day, as it were to-morrow. I shall never, never hear you speak in your place in the Capitol of this great country?"

The Senator said hastily that he feared —he in fact was convinced—that his duty during this session was required more at his desk, in the committee work, than in speaking, &c., &c.

"Ah," said Carmen sadly, "it is true, then, all this that I have heard. It is true that what they have told me,—that you have given up the great party,—that your voice is not longer heard in the old—what you call this—eh—the old *issues?*"

"If any one has told you that, Miss De Haro," responded the Senator sharply, "he has spoken foolishly. You have been misinformed. May I ask who—"

"Ah!" said Carmen, "I know not! It is in the air! I am a stranger. Perhaps I am de-ceived. But it is of all. I say to them, When shall I hear him speak? I go day after day to the Capitol, I watch him,

—the great Emancipator,—but it is of business, eh?—it is the claim of that one, it is the tax, eh? it is the impost, it is the post-office, but it is the great speech of human rights—*never,* NEVER. I say, 'How arrives all this?' And some say, and shake their heads, 'never again he speaks.' He is what you call 'played—yes, it is so, eh?—played out.' I know it not,—it is a word from Bos-ton, perhaps? They say he has—eh, I speak not the English well—the party he has shaken, 'shook,'—yes,—he has the party 'shaken,' eh? It is right,—it is the language of Bos-ton, eh?"

"Permit me to say, Miss De Haro," returned the Senator, rising with some asperity, "that you seem to have been unfortunate in your selection of acquaintances, and still more so in your ideas of the derivations of the English tongue. The—er—the—er—expressions you have quoted are not common to Boston, but emanate, I believe, from the West."

Carmen de Haro contritely buried everything but her black eyes in her shawl.

"No one," he continued, more gently, sitting down again, "has the right to fore-

cast from my past what I intend to do in the future, or designate the means I may choose to serve the principles I hold or the party I represent. Those are *my* functions. At the same time, should occasion —or opportunity—for we are within a day or two of the close of the Session—"

"Yes," interrupted Carmen, sadly, "I see,—it will be some business, some claim, something for somebody,—ah! *Madre de Dios,*—you will not speak, and I—"

"When do you think of returning?" asked the Senator, with grave politeness; "when are we to lose you?"

"I shall stay to the last,—to the end of the Session," said Carmen. "And *now* I shall go." She got up and pulled her shawl viciously over her shoulders, with a pretty pettishness, perhaps the most feminine thing she had done that evening. Possibly, the most genuine.

The Senator smiled affably: "You do not deserve to be disappointed in either case; but it is later than you imagine; let me help you on the shorter distance in my carriage; it is at the door."

He accompanied her gravely to the carriage. As it rolled away, she buried her

little figure in its ample cushions and chuckled to herself, albeit a little hysterically. When she had reached her destination, she found herself crying, and hastily, and somewhat angrily, dried her eyes as she drew up at the door of her lodgings.

"How have you prospered?" asked Mr. Harlowe, of counsel for Royal Thatcher, as he gallantly assisted her from the carriage. "I have been waiting here for two hours; your interview must have been prolonged,—that was a good sign."

"Don't ask me now," said Carmen, a little savagely, "I'm worn out and tired."

Mr. Harlowe bowed. "I trust you will be better to-morrow, for we expect our friend, Mr. Thatcher."

Carmen's brown cheek flushed slightly. "He should have been here before. Where is he? What was he doing?"

"He was snowed up on the plains. He is coming as fast as steam can carry him; but he may be too late."

Carmen did not reply.

The lawyer lingered. "How did you find the great New-England Senator?" he asked with a slight professional levity.

Carmen was tired, Carmen was worried, Carmen was a little self-reproachful, and she kindled easily. Consequently she said icily:

"I found him *a gentleman!*"

CHAPTER XV.

HOW IT BECAME UNFINISHED BUSINESS.

The closing of the —— Congress was not unlike the closing of the several preceding Congresses. There was the same unbusiness-like, impractical haste; the same hurried, unjust, and utterly inadequate adjustment of unfinished, ill-digested business, that would not have been tolerated for a moment by the sovereign people in any private interest they controlled. There were frauds rushed through; there were long-suffering, righteous demands shelved; there were honest, unpaid debts dishonored by scant appropriations; there were closing scenes which only the saving sense of American humor kept from being utterly vile. The actors, the legislators themselves, knew it, and laughed at it; the commentators, the Press, knew it and laughed at it; the

audience, the great American people, knew it and laughed at it. And nobody for an instant conceived that it ever, under any circumstances, might be otherwise.

The claim of Roscommon was among the Unfinished Business. The claimant himself, haggard, pathetic, importunate, and obstinate, was among the Unfinished Business. Various Congressmen, more or less interested in the success of the claim, were among the Unfinished Business. The member from Fresno, who had changed his derringer for a speech against the claimant, was among the Unfinished Business. The gifted Gashwiler, uneasy in his soul over certain other Unfinished Business in the shape of his missing letters, but dropping oil and honey as he mingled with his brothers, was King of Misrule and Lord of the Unfinished Business. Pretty Mrs. Hopkinson, prudently escorted by her husband, but imprudently ogled by admiring Congressmen, lent the charm of her presence to the finishing of Unfinished Business. One or two editors, who had dreams of a finished financial business, arising out of Unfinished Business, were there also, like ancient bards,

to record with pæan or threnody the completion of Unfinished Business. Various unclean birds, scenting carrion in Unfinished Business, hovered in the halls or roosted in the Lobby.

The lower house, under the tutelage of the gifted Gashwiler, drank deeply of Roscommon and his intoxicating claim, and passed the half-empty bottle to the Senate as Unfinished Business. But, alas! in the very rush, and storm, and tempest of the unfinishing business, an unlooked-for interruption arose in the person of a great Senator whose power none could oppose, whose right to free and extended utterance at all times none could gainsay. A claim for poultry, violently seized by the army of Sherman during his march through Georgia, from the hen-coop of an alleged loyal Irishman, opened a constitutional question, and with it the lips of the great Senator.

For seven hours he spoke eloquently, earnestly, convincingly. For seven hours the old issues of party and policy were severally taken up and dismissed in the old forcible rhetoric that had early made him famous. Interruptions from other

Senators, now forgetful of Unfinished Business, and wild with reanimated party zeal; interruptions from certain Senators mindful of Unfinished Business, and unable to pass the Roscommon bottle, only spurred him to fresh exertion. The tocsin sounded in the Senate was heard in the lower house. Highly-excited members congregated at the doors of the Senate, and left Unfinished Business to take care of itself.

Left to itself for seven hours, Unfinished Business gnashed its false teeth and tore its wig in impotent fury in corridor and hall. For seven hours the gifted Gashwiler had continued the manufacture of oil and honey, whose sweetness, however, was slowly palling upon the congressional lip; for seven hours Roscommon and friends beat with impatient feet the lobby, and shook fists, more or less discolored, at the distinguished Senator. For seven hours the one or two editors were obliged to sit and calmly compliment the great speech which that night flashed over the wires of a continent with the old electric thrill. And, worse than all, they were obliged to record with it the clos-

ing of the —— Congress, with more than the usual amount of Unfinished Business.

A little group of friends surrounded the great Senator with hymns of praise and congratulations. Old adversaries saluted him courteously as they passed by with the respect of strong men. A little woman with a shawl drawn over her shoulders, and held with one small brown hand, approached him timidly:

"I speak not the English well," she said gently, "but I have read much. I have read in the plays of your Shakspeare. I would like to say to you the words of Rosalind to Orlando when he did fight: 'Sir you have wrestled well, and have overthrown more than your enemies.'" And with these words she was gone.

Yet not so quickly but that pretty Mrs. Hopkinson, coming,—as Victrix always comes to Victor, to thank the great Senator, albeit the faces of her escorts were shrouded in gloom,—saw the shawled figure disappear.

"There," she said, pinching Wiles mischievously, "there! that's the woman you were afraid of. Look at her. Look at that

dress. Ah, Heavens! look at that shawl. Didn't I tell you she had no style?"

"Who is she?" said Wiles sullenly.

"Carmen de Haro, of course," said the lady vivaciously. "What are you hurrying away so for? You're absolutely pulling me along."

Mr. Wiles had just caught sight of the travel-worn face of Royal Thatcher among the crowd that thronged the stair-case. Thatcher appeared pale and *distrait:* Mr. Harlowe, his counsel, at his side, rallied him.

"No one would think you had just got a new lease of your property, and escaped a great swindle. What's the matter with you? Miss De Haro passed us just now. It was she who spoke to the Senator. Why did you not recognize her?"

"I was thinking," said Thatcher gloomily.

"Well, you take things coolly! And certainly you are not very demonstrative towards the woman who saved you to-day. For, as sure as you live, it was she who drew that speech out of the Senator."

Thatcher did not reply, but moved away. He *had* noticed Carmen de Haro,

and was about to greet her with mingled pleasure and embarrassment. But he had heard her compliment to the Senator, and this strong, preoccupied, automatic man, who only ten days before had no thought beyond his property, was now thinking more of that compliment to another than of his success; and was beginning to hate the Senator who had saved him, the lawyer who stood beside him, and even the little figure that had tripped down the steps unconscious of him.

CHAPTER XVI.

AND WHO FORGOT IT.

It was somewhat inconsistent with Royal Thatcher's embarrassment and sensitiveness that he should, on leaving the Capitol, order a carriage and drive directly to the lodgings of Miss De Haro. That on finding she was not at home, he should become again sulky and suspicious, and even be ashamed of the honest impulse that led him there, was, I suppose, manlike and natural. He felt that he had done all the courtesy required; he had promptly answered her dispatch with his presence. If she chose to be absent at such a moment, *he* had at least done *his* duty. In short, there was scarcely any absurdity of the imagination which this once practical man did not permit himself to indulge in, yet always with a certain consciousness that he was allowing his

feelings to run away with him,—a fact that did not tend to make him better humored, and rather inclined him to place the responsibility of the elopement on somebody else. If Miss De Haro had been home, &c. &c., and not going into ecstasies over speeches, &c. &c., and had attended to her business,—*i. e.,* being exactly what he had supposed her to be,—all this would not have happened.

I am aware that this will not heighten the reader's respect for my hero. But I fancy that the imperceptible progress of a sincere passion in the matured strong man is apt to be marked with even more than the usual haste and absurdity of callous youth.

The fever that runs riot in the veins of the robust is apt to pass your ailing weakling by. Possibly there may be some immunity in inoculation. It is Lothario who is always self-possessed and does and says the right thing, while poor honest Cœlebs becomes ridiculous with genuine emotion.

He rejoined his lawyer in no very gracious mood. The chambers occupied by Mr. Harlowe were in the basement of

a private dwelling once occupied and made historic by an Honorable Somebody, who, however, was remembered only by the landlord and the last tenant. There were various shelves in the walls divided into compartments, sarcastically known as "pigeon holes," in which the dove of peace had never rested, but which still perpetuated, in their legends, the feuds and animosities of suitors now but common dust together. There was a portrait, apparently of a cherub, which on nearer inspection turned out to be a famous English Lord Chancellor in his flowing wig.

There were books with dreary, unenlivening titles,—egostistic always, as recording Smith's opinions on this, and Jones's commentaries on that. There was a hand bill tacked on the wall, which at first offered hilarious suggestions of a circus or a steamboat excursion, but which turned out only to be a sheriff's sale. There were several oddly-shaped packages in newspaper wrappings, mysterious and awful in dark corners, that might have contained forgotten law papers or the previous week's washing of the eminent coun-

sel. There were one or two newspapers, which at first offered entertaining prospects to the waiting client, but always proved to be a law record or a Supreme Court decision. There was the bust of a late distinguished jurist, which apparently had never been dusted since he himself became dust, and had already grown a perceptibly dusty moustache on his severely-judicial upper lip. It was a cheerless place in the sunshine of day; at night, when it ought, by every suggestion of its dusty past, to have been left to the vengeful ghosts, the greater part of whose hopes and passions were recorded and gathered there; when in the dark the dead hands of forgotten men were stretched from their dusty graves to fumble once more for their old title deeds; at night, when it was lit up by flaring gaslight, the hollow mockery of this dissipation was so apparent that people in the streets, looking through the illuminated windows, felt as if the privacy of a family vault had been intruded upon by body-snatchers.

Royal Thatcher glanced around the room, took in all its dreary suggestions in a half-weary, half-indifferent sort of way,

and dropped into the lawyer's own revolving chair as that gentleman entered from the adjacent room.

"Well, you got back soon, I see," said Harlowe briskly.

"Yes," said his client, without looking up, and with this notable distinction between himself and all other previous clients, that he seemed absolutely less interested than the lawyer. "Yes, I'm here; and, upon my soul, I don't exactly know why."

"You told me of certain papers you had discovered," said the lawyer suggestively.

"Oh, yes," returned Thatcher with a slight yawn. "I've got here some papers somewhere;"—he began to feel in his coat pocket languidly;—"but, by the way, this is a rather dreary and God-forsaken sort of place! Let's go up to Welker's, and you can look at them over a bottle of champagne."

"After I've looked at them, I've something to show you, myself," said Harlowe; "and as for the champagne, we'll have that in the other room, by and by. At present I want to have my head clear, and yours

too,—if you'll oblige me by becoming sufficiently interested in your own affairs to talk to me about them."

Thatcher was gazing abstractedly at the fire. He started. "I dare say," he began, "I'm not very interesting; yet it's possible that my affairs have taken up a little too much of my time. However,—" he stopped, took from his pocket an envelope, and threw it on the desk,—"there are some papers. I don't know what value they may be; that is for you to determine. I don't know that I've any legal right to their possession,—that is for you to say, too. They came to me in a queer way. On the overland journey here I lost my bag, containing my few traps and some letters and papers 'of no value,' as the advertisements say, 'to any but the owner.' Well, the bag was lost, but the stage driver declares that it was stolen by a fellow-passenger,—a man by the name of Giles, or Stiles, or Biles—"

"Wiles," said Harlowe earnestly.

"Yes," continued Thatcher, suppressing a yawn; "yes, I guess you're right,—Wiles. Well, the stage driver, finally believing this, goes to work and quietly and

unostentatiously steals—I say, have you got a cigar?"

"I'll get you one."

Harlowe disappeared in the adjoining room. Thatcher dragged Harlowe's heavy, revolving desk chair, which never before had been removed from its sacred position, to the fire, and began to poke the coals abstractedly.

Harlowe reappeared with cigars and matches. Thatcher lit one mechanically, and said, between the puffs:

"Do you—ever—talk—to yourself?"

"No!—why?"

"I thought I heard your voice just now in the other room. Anyhow, this is an awful spooky place. If I stayed here alone half an hour, I'd fancy that the Lord Chancellor up there would step down in his robes, out of his frame, to keep me company."

"Nonsense! When I'm busy, I often sit here and write until after midnight. It's so quiet!"

"D—mnably so!"

"Well, to go back to the papers. Somebody stole your bag, or you lost it. *You* stole—"

"The driver stole," suggested Thatcher, so languidly that it could hardly be called an interruption.

"Well, we'll say the driver stole, and passed over to you as his accomplice, confederate, or receiver, certain papers belonging—"

"See here, Harlowe, I don't feel like joking in a ghostly law office after midnight. Here are your facts. Yuba Bill, the driver, stole a bag from this passenger, Wiles, or Smiles, and handed it to me to insure the return of my own. I found in it some papers concerning my case. There they are. Do with them what you like."

Thatcher turned his eyes again abstractedly to the fire.

Harlowe took out the first paper:

"A-w, this seems to be a telegram. Yes, eh? 'Come to Washington at once.—Carmen de Haro.'"

Thatcher started, blushed like a girl, and hurriedly reached for the paper.

"Nonsense. That's a mistake. A dispatch I mislaid in the envelope."

"I see," said the lawyer dryly.

"I thought I had torn it up," continued

Thatcher, after an awkward pause. I regret to say that here that usually truthful man elaborated a fiction. He had consulted it a dozen times a day on the journey, and it was quite worn in its enfoldings. Harlowe's quick eye had noticed this, but he speedily became interested and absorbed in the other papers. Thatcher lapsed into contemplation of the fire.

"Well," said Harlowe, finally turning to his client, "here's enough to unseat Gashwiler, or close his mouth. As to the rest, it's good reading—but I needn't tell you —no *legal* evidence. But it's proof enough to stop them from ever trying it again,—when the existence of this record is made known. Bribery is a hard thing to fix on a man; the only witness is naturally *particeps criminis;*—but it would not be easy for them to explain away this rascal's record. One or two things I don't understand: What's this opposite the Hon. X's name, 'Took the medicine nicely, and feels better?' and here, just in the margin, after Y's, 'Must be labored with?'"

"I suppose our California slang borrows largely from the medical and spiritual profession," returned Thatcher. 'But isn't it

odd that a man should keep a conscientious record of his own villainy?"

Harlowe, a little abashed at his want of knowledge of American metaphor, now felt himself at home. "Well, no. It's not unusual. In one of those books yonder there is the record of a case where a man, who had committed a series of nameless atrocities, extending over a period of years, absolutely kept a memorandum of them in his pocket diary. It was produced in Court. Why, my dear fellow, one half our business arises from the fact that men and women are in the habit of keeping letters and documents that they might—I don't say, you know, that they *ought,* that's a question of sentiment or ethics—but that they *might* destroy."

Thatcher half-mechanically took the telegram of poor Carmen and threw it in the fire. Harlowe noticed the act and smiled.

"I'll venture to say, however, that there's nothing in the bag that *you* lost that need give you a moment's uneasiness. It's only your rascal or fool who carries with him that which makes him his own detective."

"I had a friend," continued Harlowe, "a

clever fellow enough, but who was so foolish as to seriously complicate himself with a woman. He was himself the soul of honor, and at the beginning of their correspondence he proposed that they should each return the other's letters with their answer. They did so for years, but it cost him ten thousand dollars and no end of trouble after all."

"Why?" asked Thatcher simply.

"Because he was such an egotistical ass as *to keep the letter proposing it,* which she had duly returned, among his papers as a sentimental record. Of course somebody eventually found it."

"Good night," said Thatcher, rising abruptly. "If I stayed here much longer I should begin to disbelieve my own mother."

"I have known of such hereditary traits," returned Harlowe with a laugh. "But come, you must not go without the champagne." He led the way to the adjacent room, which proved to be only the ante-chamber of another, on the threshold of which Thatcher stopped with genuine surprise. It was an elegantly furnished library.

"Sybarite! Why was I never here before?"

"Because you came as a client; to-night you are my guest. All who enter here leave their business, with their hats, in the hall. Look; there isn't a law book on those shelves; that table never was defaced by a title deed or parchment. You look puzzled? Well, it was a whim of mine to put my residence and my work-shop under the same roof, yet so distinct that they would never interfere with each other. You know the house above is let out to lodgers. I occupy the first floor with my mother and sister, and this is my parlor. I do my work in that severe room that fronts the street: here is where I play. A man must have something else in life than mere business. I find it less harmful and expensive to have my pleasure here."

Thatcher had sunk moodily in the embracing arms of an easy chair. He was thinking deeply; he was fond of books too, and, like all men who have fared hard and led wandering lives, he knew the value of cultivated repose. Like all men who have been obliged to sleep under blankets and in the open air, he appreciated the luxuries

of linen sheets and a frescoed roof. It is, by the way, only your sick city clerk or your dyspeptic clergyman who fancy that they have found in the bad bread, fried steaks, and frowzy flannels of mountain picknicking the true art of living. And it is a somewhat notable fact that your true mountaineer or your gentleman who has been obliged to honestly "rough it," does not, as a general thing, write books about its advantages, or implore their fellow mortals to come and share their solitude and their discomforts.

Thoroughly appreciating the taste and comfort of Harlowe's library, yet half-envious of its owner, and half-suspicious that his own earnest life for the past few years might have been different, Thatcher suddenly started from his seat and walked towards a parlor easel, whereon stood a picture. It was Carmen de Haro's first sketch of the furnace and the mine.

"I see you are taken with that picture," said Harlowe, pausing with the champagne bottle in his hand. "You show your good taste. It's been much admired. Observe how splendidly that firelight plays over the sleeping face of that figure, yet brings out

by very contrast its almost death-like repose. Those rocks are powerfully handled; what a suggestion of mystery in those shadows! You know the painter?"

Thatcher murmured, "Miss De Haro," with a new and rather odd self-consciousness in speaking her name.

"Yes. And you know the story of the picture of course?"

Thatcher thought he didn't. Well, no; in fact, he did not remember.

"Why, this recumbent figure was an old Spanish lover of hers, whom she believed to have been murdered there. It's a ghastly fancy, isn't it?"

Two things annoyed Thatcher: first the epithet "lover," as applied to Concho by another man; second, that the picture belonged to him: and what the d—l did she mean by—

"Yes," he broke out finally, "but how did *you* get it?"

"Oh, I bought it of her. I've been a sort of patron of her ever since I found out how she stood towards us. As she was quite alone here in Washington, my mother and sister have taken her up, and have been doing the social thing."

"How long since?" asked Thatcher.

"Oh, not long. The day she telegraphed you, she came here to know what she could do for us, and when I said nothing could be done except to keep Congress off, why, she went and *did it.* For *she,* and she alone, got that speech out of the Senator. But," he added, a little mischievously, "you seem to know very little about her?"

"No!—I—that is—I've been very busy lately," returned Thatcher, staring at the picture. "Does she come here often?"

"Yes, lately, quite often; she was here this evening with mother; was here, I think, when you came."

Thatcher looked intently at Harlowe. But that gentleman's face betrayed no confusion. Thatcher refilled his glass a little awkwardly, tossed off the liquor at a draught, and rose to his feet.

"Come, old fellow, you're not going now. I shan't permit it," said Harlowe, laying his hand kindly on his client's shoulder. "You're out of sorts! Stay here with me to-night. Our accommodations are not large, but are elastic. I can bestow you comfortably until morning. Wait here a moment while I give the necessary orders."

Thatcher was not sorry to be left alone. In the last half hour he had become convinced that his love for Carmen de Haro had been in some way most dreadfully abused. While *he* was hard at work in California, she was being introduced in Washington society by parties with eligible brothers who bought her paintings. It is a relief to the truly jealous mind to indulge in plurals. Thatcher liked to think that she was already beset by hundreds of brothers.

He still kept staring at the picture. By and by it faded away in part, and a very vivid recollection of the misty, midnight, moonlit walk he had once taken with her came back, and refilled the canvas with its magic. He saw the ruined furnace; the dark, overhanging masses of rock, the trembling intricacies of foliage, and, above all, the flash of dark eyes under a *mantilla* at his shoulder. What a fool he had been! Had he not really been as senseless and stupid as this very Concho, lying here like a log? And she had loved that man. What a fool she must have thought him that evening! What a snob she must think him now!

He was startled by a slight rustling in the passage, that ceased almost as he turned. Thatcher looked towards the door of the outer office, as if half expecting that the Lord Chancellor, like the commander in Don Juan, might have accepted his thoughtless invitation. He listened again; everything was still. He was conscious of feeling ill at ease and a trifle nervous. What a long time Harlowe took to make his preparations. He would look out in the hall. To do this it was necessary to turn up the gas. He did so, and in his confusion turned it out!

Where were the matches? He remembered that there was a bronze something on the table that, in the irony of modern decorative taste, might hold ashes or matches, or anything of an unpicturesque character. He knocked something over, evidently the ink,—something else,—this time a champagne glass. Becoming reckless, and now groping at random in the ruins, he overturned the bronze Mercury on the center table, and then sat down hopelessly in his chair. And then a pair of velvet fingers slid into his, with the matches, and this audible, musical statement:

"It is a match you are seeking? Here is of them."

Thatcher flushed, embarrassed, nervous, —feeling the ridiculousness of saying, "Thank you" to a dark somebody,—struck the match, beheld by its brief, uncertain glimmer Carmen de Haro beside him, burned his fingers, coughed, dropped the match, and was cast again into outer darkness.

"Let me try!"

Carmen struck a match, jumped briskly on the chair, lit the gas, jumped lightly down again, and said: "You do like to sit in the dark,—eh? So am I—sometimes—alone."

"Miss De Haro," said Thatcher, with sudden, honest earnestness, advancing with outstretched hands, "believe me I am sincerely delighted, overjoyed, again to meet—"

She had, however, quickly retreated as he approached, ensconcing herself behind the high back of a large antique chair, on the cushion of which she knelt. I regret to add also that she slapped his outstretched fingers a little sharply with her inevitable black fan as he still advanced.

"We are not in California. It is Washington. It is after midnight. I am a poor girl, and I have to lose—what you call—'a character.' You shall sit over there,"—she pointed to the sofa,—"and I shall sit here;" she rested her boyish head on the top of the chair; "and we shall talk, for I have to speak to you, Don Royal."

Thatcher took the seat indicated, contritely, humbly, submissively. Carmen's little heart was touched. But she still went on over the back of the chair.

"Don Royal," she said, emphasizing each word at him with her fan, "before I saw you,—ever knew of you,—I was a child. Yes, I was but a child! I was a bold, bad child;—and I was what you call a—a—'forgaire'!"

"A what?" asked Thatcher, hesitating between a smile and a sigh.

"A forgaire!" continued Carmen demurely. "I did of myself write the names of ozzer peoples;" when Carmen was excited she lost the control of the English tongue; "I did write just to please myself;—it was my onkle that did make of it money;—you understand, eh? Shall you not speak? Must I again hit you?"

"Go on," said Thatcher laughing.

"I did find out, when I came to you at the mine, that I had forged against you the name of Micheltorena. I to the lawyer went, and found that it was so—of a verity —so! so! all the time. Look at me not now, Don Royal;—it is a 'forgaire' you stare at."

"Carmen!"

"Hoosh! Shall I have to hit you again? I did overlook all the papers. I found the application: it was written by me. There."

She tossed over the back of her chair an envelope to Thatcher. He opened it.

"I see," he said gently, "you repossessed yourself of it!"

"What is that—'r-r-r-e—possess'?"

"Why!"—Thatcher hesitated—"you got possession of this paper,—this innocent forgery,—again."

"Oh! You think me a thief as well as a 'forgaire.' Go away! Get up. Get out."

"My dear girl—"

"Look at the paper! Will you? Oh, you silly!"

Thatcher looked at the paper. In paper,

handwriting, age, and stamp it was identical with the formal, clerical application of Garcia for the grant. The indorsement of Micheltorena was unquestionably genuine. *But the application was made for Royal Thatcher.* And his own signature was imitated to the life.

"I had but one letter of yours wiz your name," said Carmen apologetically; "and it was the best poor me could do."

"Why, you blessed little goose and angel," said Thatcher, with the bold, mixed metaphor of amatory genius, "don't you see—"

"Ah, you don't like it,—it is not good?"

"My darling!"

"Hoosh! There is also an 'old cat' up stairs. And now I have here a character. *Will* you sit down? Is it of a necessity that up and down you should walk and awaken the whole house? There!"—she had given him a vicious dab with her fan as he passed. He sat down.

"And you have not seen me nor written to me for a year?"

"Carmen!"

"Sit down, you bold, bad boy. Don't you see it is of business that you and I talk

down here; and it is of business that ozzer people up stairs are thinking. Eh?"

"D—n business! See here, Carmen, my darling, tell me"—I regret to say he had by this time got hold of the back of Carmen's chair—"tell me, my own little girl, —about—about that Senator. You remember what you said to him?"

"Oh, the old man? Oh, *that* was business. And you say of business, 'd—n.'"

"Carmen!"

"Don Royal!"

. . . . . .

Although Miss Carmen had recourse to her fan frequently during this interview, the air must have been chilly, for a moment later, on his way down stairs, poor Harlowe, a sufferer from bronchitis, was attacked with a violent fit of coughing, which troubled him all the way down.

"Well," he said, as he entered the room, "I see you have found Mr. Thatcher, and shown those papers. I trust you have, for you've certainly had time enough. I am sent by mother to dismiss you all to bed."

Carmen still in the arm chair, covered with her *mantilla*, did not speak.

"I suppose you are by this time lawyer

enough to know," continued Harlowe, "that Miss De Haro's papers, though ingenious, are not legally available, unless—"

"I chose to make her a witness. Harlowe! you're a good fellow! I don't mind saying to you that these are papers I prefer that my *wife* should not use. We'll leave it for the present—Unfinished Business."

They did. But one evening our hero brought Mrs. Royal Thatcher a paper containing a touching and beautiful tribute to the dead Senator.

"There, Carmen, love, read that. Don't you feel a little ashamed of your—your—your lobbying—"

"No," said Carmen promptly. "It was business,—and if all lobbying business was as honest,—well?—"

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